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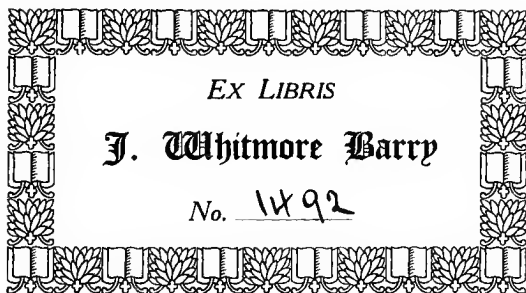


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The Plays of
Eugène Brieux



The Plays of Eugène Brieux

By

P. V. Thomas, M.A.

Assistant in French at University College, London

London

A. C. Fifield, 13 Clifford's Inn, E.C.

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Chronological List of Plays

1879. BERNARD PALISSY. One Act in Verse. In collaboration with M. Gaston Salandri. Published by Stock and Tresse. 1880.
1880. LE BUREAU DES DIVORCES. Vaudeville in One Act. In collaboration with M. Gaston Salandri. Published by Vannier. 1880.
1890. MÉNAGES D'ARTISTES. Comedy in Three Acts. Published by Stock and Tresse. 1890.
1890. LA FILLE DE DURAMÉ. Drama in Five Acts. Published by C. Lapierre. Rouen. 1890.
1892. BLANCHETTE. Comedy in Three Acts. Published by Stock and Tresse. 1892, 1899, 1904.
1892. M. DE RÉBOVAL. Comedy in Four Acts. Never published.
1893. LA COUVÉE. Comedy in Three Acts. Published by Stock and Tresse. 1893.
1894. L'ENGRENAGE. Comedy in Three Acts. Published by Stock and Tresse. 1894.
1895. LA ROSE BLEUE. Comedy Vaudeville in One Act. Published by Stock and Tresse. 1895.
1896. LES BIENFAITEURS. Comedy in Four Acts. Published by P. V. Stock. 1897.
1896. L'ÉVASION. Comedy in Three Acts. Published by P. V. Stock. 1897.
1897. LES TROIS FILLES DE M. DUPONT. Comedy in Four Acts. Published by P. V. Stock. 1899.
1898. L'ÉCOLE DES BELLES-MÈRES. Comedy in One Act. Published by P. V. Stock. 1898.

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1898. *RÉSULTAT DES COURSES*. Comedy in Six Tableaux. Published by P. V. Stock. 1898.
1898. *LE BERCEAU*. Comedy in Three Acts. Published by P. V. Stock. 1898.
- ✕1900. *LA ROBE ROUGE*. Play in Four Acts. Published by P. V. Stock. 1900.
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- ✕1901. *LES AVARIÉS*. Play in Three Acts. Published by P. V. Stock. 1902.
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- ✕1903. *MATERNITÉ*. Play in Three Acts. Published by P. V. Stock. 1904.
1904. *LA DÉSERTEUSE*. Play in Four Acts. Published by P. V. Stock. 1904.
1905. *L'ARMATURE*. Play in Five Acts (after the novel by M. Paul Hervieu). Published by P. V. Stock. 1905.
1906. *LES HANNETONS*. Comedy in Three Acts. Published by P. V. Stock. 1906.
1907. *LA FRANÇAISE*. Comedy in Three Acts.
1908. *SIMONE*. Play in Three Acts. Published by P. V. Stock. 1908.
1909. *SUZETTE*. Play in Three Acts. Published by P. V. Stock. 1909.

This is a list of the plays studied in this volume ; it does not include the two latest plays :—

LA FOI, first produced by Sir Herbert Tree in September, 1909, under the titles of "False Gods."

LA FEMME SEULE, first produced at the Théâtre du Gymnase in December, 1912.

The Plays of Eugène Brieux

Chapter I

The Man¹

M. BRIEUX first received me just after his return from the East and a little before his reception at the Academy, but there was nothing exotic or pompous about him. Simple, cordial, and very accessible: tall, big, easy in manner, with a sound, practical grip of things, and a fighter—not filled with a fussy pugnacity, but still a fighter—not too hard to rouse, and a very hard hitter when roused. For the rest, simple, direct, not modest, not assertive, full of the right sort of pride, and plenty of vanity doubtless. Capable of being very serious, but not deadly serious. Keen and

¹ To supplement this impression it may be as well to quote a passage from the brochure of M. Adrien Bertrand, full of an explicit enthusiasm of which English is incapable.

“Je le vois encore ce jour-là; grand, les épaules larges et le torse puissant, avec des cheveux frisés, blonds, moins blonds que la moustache, la figure bronzée sous l’effort d’un sang riche, et des yeux purs, très profonds, admirablement clairs, admirablement bleus. Il avait un veston dont la teinte rouge augmentait encore cette atmosphère de puissance qui se dégageait de lui: Et Brieux vous donnait l’impression de quelque robuste paladin, tant sa personne physique correspond exactement à toute sa vie d’enthousiasme et d’action.” (*Les Célébrités d’Aujourd’hui. E. Brieux*, par Adrien Bertrand, p. 5.)

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interested at once, with the native curiosity and shrewdness of a peasant. Not a specialist. A very human man in every way, *naïf et foncièrement bon*, with the absorbing eye of an observer and the jaw of a fighter.

The details of his life are barely sufficient to piece together—he has always refused to talk about himself: "*Ma vie privée*," he says, "*ne regarde pas le public*." Such a desire for privacy must be respected. He was born in Paris in 1858. His father was a working man, a carpenter in the *Quartier du Temple*, and unable to give him anything more than the ordinary schooling. The *Ecole Primaire* and the *Ecole Primaire Supérieure* (*Ecole Turgot*) was all the education that was ever given him. He did not distinguish himself at school in any marked degree, nor did he disgrace himself. His Academician's sword was presented to him by the *Ecole Turgot*. At fifteen he began to work for his living as an *employé*. It has been said that he began life as an *ouvrier*, but this is incorrect. He did not, however, stop learning. Reading with him was a veritable passion. He spent not only his leisure, but all his savings on books—whatever books came to his hand; not, however, illustrated papers and *romans feuilletons*, but famous masterpieces, and preferably the Classics. He was a very good customer of the popular series known as the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, which, for the sum of twenty-five centimes, places within the reach of all the masterpieces of every tongue. It was in this way that Goethe's *Faust* was revealed to him and intoxicated him. He spent night after night reading, sometimes on the public staircase of the house in which he lived by the light of the miserable gas-jet, in order to save the cost of candles. He had, too, a passion for Chateaubriand,

the influence of whose Christianity has been strong during the whole of the nineteenth century. The young Brieux was filled with religious ardour, and had serious thoughts of becoming a missionary. The ardour has remained an essential part of his temperament, though the dogma has been changed under the influence of Spencerian philosophy. Gradually he began to read in more ordered fashion, and started to learn Latin and Greek without any other aid than that of grammar and dictionary. He soon gave up Greek, but persevered with Latin, and acquired a fair knowledge of it. Literary ambitions were not slow to follow. He began to write plays early, and continued to write them in what leisure was left to him after his day's work was done, though his success was not better than is usually the case. Manuscripts passed from manager to manager without being read. At last, in 1879, when he was just over twenty, his first play was produced at the *Théâtre Cluny*, at one of the *Matinées des Jeunes*—a one-act play in verse, in collaboration with a friend, M. Gaston Salandri, entitled *Bernard Palissy*. Only one performance was given. Meanwhile the ambitious young man had decided to throw up his employment and take to journalism, not as a career satisfactory in itself, but as a more likely road to literary success. For seven years he did newspaper work, first at Dieppe, then at Rouen. He still continued to write plays, three being produced between *Bernard Palissy* and *Blanchette*. Only one of these, *Ménages d'Artistes*, calls for remark here. This play brought its author into contact with M. Antoine. His first real hit was made, in 1892, with *Blanchette*, also produced by M. Antoine. It is to M. Antoine that we owe the discovery of M. Brieux ; and, more than that,

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it is M. Antoine who gave him the opportunity of learning his *métier*, of learning how to tackle dramatic problems, and of collaborating with actors and public. *Blanchette* is the play that made M. Brieux famous. He is still referred to as the author of *Blanchette*. It was produced while he was still at Rouen, but shortly after *La Nouvelliste*, the newspaper of which he was editor, ceased to exist, and M. Brieux returned to Paris with the manuscript of *M. de Réboval* in his pocket. The importance of his long residence in Rouen can hardly be overestimated; not only did he thus escape being caught up in any of the literary fads and fancies of the *boulevards*, but also he was better able, in a comparatively small centre, such as Rouen, to grasp life as a whole than amid the complexities of the metropolis. At Rouen he learnt as editor to face questions of public interest. Here he acquired his experience of men and affairs. The knowledge of provincial life thus acquired was to stand him in good stead. Without his sojourn in Rouen he would never have written *L'Engrenage* or *Blanchette*. He quickly came to the front with *L'Engrenage* (1894) and *Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont* (1897). On his return to Paris he continued the *métier* of journalist, writing for the *Figaro* and other papers. In the exercise of his profession he must have frequently had occasion to attend the Law Courts. The fruit of his lengthy observations is to be seen in such a play as *La Robe Rouge* (1900). With this play his position as an undoubted master is assured. With the exception of *Les Remplaçantes* (1901), *Les Hanneçons* (1906), and *Simone* (1908), the later plays show rather a falling off. The energy needed to get all the heavy artillery of the *Pièce Sociale* into action—into dramatic

action—must be great. What wonder if even the energy of M. Brioux is sometimes insufficient. His election to the Academy in 1910 crowned his achievements with the highest honour that he could wish for and satisfied a long-cherished ambition.

Chapter II

The Plays before *Blanchette*

THE plays that precede *Blanchette*, namely, *Bernard Palissy*, *Le Bureau des Divorces*, *Ménages d'Artistes*, and *La Fille de Duramé*, are not important, but they cannot be ignored. The origins of a man are always interesting.

BERNARD PALISSY. Drama in one act in verse, in collaboration with G. Salandri. Played for the first time the 21st of December, 1879, at the *Théâtre Cluny*.

The scene is at Saintes about 1560 and represents a room on the ground floor in the house of Palissy. The red light of furnaces shows in the background. There is no furniture, even the door is missing, everything made of wood having been burnt to fire the furnaces.

The wife of Palissy, Geneviève, wishes to leave him because, after years of suffering, they have been reduced to ruin. Palissy, not content with being the most esteemed of glass painters, has lost everything by trying to discover a secret which he will never find—the secret of making enamel. His daughter, Jeanne, pleads that they must not forsake him. Amid the insults and jeers of the mob Palissy enters. Etienne comes to his rescue. Etienne loves Jeanne, but his father, Gautier, who is inexorable, refuses to allow the marriage unless Palissy will give up his chimerical ideas and return to glass-

The Plays before *Blanchette* 15

making. Etienne tries to persuade Palissy to do this, but the inspired genius cannot give up his quest, and insists upon being allowed to try once more. So the family forsake him ; but soon his faithful daughter returns and persuades Palissy to give up, which he consents to do in a rage at the sacrifice asked. It is, therefore, the turn of Jeanne to sacrifice her love to her father's glory, and the grateful Palissy returns to his furnaces. Jeanne's lover returns, unable to give her up, and later the mother returns, unable to give the father up. When they are once more assembled there is a terrific explosion and Palissy enters, crying—

“Perdu ! tout est perdu ! Tout—même l'espérance !”

After a mad outburst he goes despairingly towards his workshop.

“ Tout à l'heure j'avais encore ma confiance.
Tout était là. J'avais la sublime espérance
Et maintenant plus rien.” . . .

Going off the stage, he suddenly bursts out with—

. . . “ Qu'ai-je vu ?—J'ai rêvé
Cet émail magnifique. Ah, grand Dieu ! J'ai trouvé.”

In spite of the explosion the secret of the enamel has been found. Everyone asks his pardon, maxims float across the footlights to the effect that conception is good, perseverance better. Then the play ends with an exordium to the glory of France—the real glory of France, the glory that is better than military glory, the glory of her great men. “ Et cela ” (meaning military glory)—

“ Et cela ne vaut pas, quoiqu'on ait obtenu,
Un seul pas en avant, qu'on fait vers l'inconnu.”

It is all very high-minded. This is the only play by

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M. Brieux in verse. The passages quoted suffice to show that he was not misguided in choosing prose for his medium of expression.

LE BUREAU DES DIVORCES, published in 1880, but apparently never played, is a vaudeville in one act, satirising the new Divorce Law which had just been passed. It is very thin stuff, stale and not amusing—cheap farce ; but it indicates an interest in social questions.

La Fille de Duramé was played a few days later than *Ménages d'Artistes*, but it may be taken first for the sake of convenience.

LA FILLE DE DURAMÉ. Melodrama in five acts. Played for the first time in Rouen at the Théâtre Français, March 25th, 1890.

The titles of the five acts show what sort of play it is.

- Act I. La Fête du Loupvert à Jumièges.
- „ II. La Bande de Duramé.
- „ III. Les Grottes de Caumont.
- „ IV. Le Père et la Fille.
- „ V. L'Expiation.

The time the play begins is Friday, June 23rd, 1797, *le jour de la Fête du Loupvert*.

It would take too long to give the entire plot, but it goes without saying that it is as various, as complicated, and as thrilling as a popular provincial audience could desire.

Duramé is a brigand, and his daughter Jeanne has been changed in the cradle by Quatre Pattes for the daughter of Déronchelle, and Duramé protects his daughter without letting her know that he, the brigand,

The Plays before *Blanchette* 17

is her father. The woman Berthe is therefore jealous and clandestinely carries Jeanne off with a small party of the brigands to the Grottes de Caumont. Here the jealous Berthe starves Jeanne in order to make her confess that she loves Duramé. But Duramé comes and carries Jeanne off to Rouen to the house of Déronchelle. Here Duramé is recognised as a brigand with a price upon his head, so, having to leave, he tries to persuade Jeanne to go with him ; but she high-mindedly refuses to depart with a brigand. The gendarmes come and Duramé declares Jeanne to be his daughter.

“ O ! ma fille soit maudite ! ”

*Jeanne (avec un grand cri). Ah !
(elle tombe à genoux). Pardon !*

In the last act Duramé is guillotined and Jeanne re-established as the daughter of Déronchelle.

All art is collaboration—great is the influence of an audience ! From such a play who could foretell the author of *Blanchette*, *L'Engrenage*, and *Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont* ? These three plays seem very far off. *Ménages d'Artistes* deserves more attention, for with it the real career of M. Brieux begins.

MÉNAGES D'ARTISTES. Comedy in three acts. Played for the first time at the *Théâtre Libre*, March, 21, 1890.

Jacques Tervaux, a would-be poet, has married an ordinary *bourgeoise*, who believes that her husband is a genius and sacrifices everything to his career. Her *dot* has been swallowed up to pay for the publication of his works, her jewellery and possessions are going too.

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But she still believes in him—is he not idolised by the *cénacle* that surrounds him? She does not know that the members of the *cénacle* are worthless impostors. Their symbolist jargon, their “triunionism,” is impressive to her. And the beautiful Emma Vernier, the muse who inspires them all, is wonderful to Madame Tervaux; and is she not going to found a paper devoted to poetry and the arts, and to make her husband famous? But the mother of Madame Tervaux sees that Jacques is in love with Emma and turns her out of the place. Jacques follows her. In the last act the paper is founded, Jacques is the director and the beautiful Emma is his mistress. But the paper is not a success, and Emma, discovering that the poet is a bag of wind, withdraws her financial support and goes off with another man. Jacques, dishonoured and ruined, commits suicide.

The play is a “play unpleasant”—a *pièce rosse*, after the *Théâtre Libre* pattern, more or less.

It must always be remembered that M. Brieux began at the *Théâtre Libre*, that he is one of M. Antoine’s men.

This play was not a success. The only point worth noting is the attempt to satirise the extravagances of the Symbolist Poets, the fads and fancies of artistic Paris. It is the scorn of honest, plebeian common sense for all the poses and snobbery of the artist in splendid isolation, aloof from the contamination of ordinary virtuous life—a very legitimate subject for satire. But, in order to satirise, it is well to understand the thing satirised, and M. Brieux did not understand the Symbolist movement. The result is that the fun he makes of it is rather beside the point. It is cheap ridicule and falls flat. As Sarcey says—

The Plays before *Blanchette* 19

“Ménages d'Artistes nous a paru une pièce très puérile. Elle a la prétention de nous faire pénétrer dans le monde des jeunes poètes et jeunes artistes de la nouvelle école décadents-symbolistes et autres. J'ai quelque peine à croire qu'ils puissent être d'aussi sots et d'aussi vilains petits bonshommes que les a faits M. Eugène Brieux. Si la peinture est vraie elle n'a pas l'air de l'être.”

A small sample will serve to prove the truth of this.

Act I. Scene 8. Veule. La verbieuse manifestation n'est-elle pas étroitement adéquate pour le ton couleur, et le ton ébranlement des atmosphériques atomes ? Et je vais te convaincre d'un mot : le resplendissement des calmes, la ténébrance des cataclysmes, ne sont-ils pas idoines ? Qu'est-ce que tu peux répondre à cela.

Jacques. Rien, c'est évident.

D'Estombreuse. Chaque idée, chaque personne, chaque objet possède une couleur et une tonalité musicale.

Veule. Le basson est vert, le violon bleu, la trompette rouge.

D'Estombreuse. Parbleu !

Veule. De même que l'infini—l'infini——

Jacques. Eh bien ?

Veule. C'est le sol naturel—(*chantant*) Ping ! (*parlé*) Voila l'infini—Et Dieu—Dieu, tu sais dans quel ton il est Dieu ?

Jacques. Non.

Veule (scandalisé). Oh ! Oh ! il ne sait pas—mais en ut majeur, mon pauvre vieux.

Le Docteur. Et dire qu'ils ont l'air de se comprendre entre eux !

Veule. Sois triunioniste, mon cher.

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Jacques. Je verrai—Un peu de cognac ?

Veule. Parfaitement.¹

The truth is that M. Brieux has always remained aloof from the world of art, is not "a man of taste," and never had any ambition to become one. This is at once a source of strength and a limitation. It is to emphasise this fact that so much space has been given to *Ménages d'Artistes*.

This was the first play by M. Brieux produced by M. Antoine. Before going any further something should be said of the relations between the two men, if only by way of tribute to one who is undoubtedly the most remarkable *homme de théâtre* France has known in this generation. A large majority of the well-known dramatists of to-day issued from the *Théâtre Libre*, having been discovered and launched by M. Antoine just as M. Brieux was.

Ménages d'Artistes came to M. Antoine from Rouen from an entirely unknown author in the ordinary way, after the *Théâtre Libre* had been in existence for about two years and had already established itself at the *Menus Plaisirs*. Since then M. Antoine has produced six plays by M. Brieux (either at the *Théâtre Libre*, the *Théâtre Antoine*, opened in 1897, or the *Odéon*, of which M. Antoine became director in 1906), namely, *Blanchette*, *Résultat des Courses*, *Les Remplaçantes*, *Les Avariés*, *Maternité*, and *La Française*. As Père Rousset, in *Blanchette*, and Père-la-Joie, in *Résultat des Courses*, M. Antoine contributed largely to the success of the piece

¹ The irony of M. Anatole France makes the extravagance of the Symbolists infinitely more ridiculous than this scene by M. Brieux. (Cf. *Vie Littéraire*, II, p. 5.)

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by his acting. The two men appreciate each other and have remained firm friends. The dedication of *Blanchette* is an eloquent document :—

“ À André Antoine—Mon cher ami, pendant dix ans j’ai promené mes manuscrits dans tous les théâtres de Paris. Le plus souvent ils n’étaient même pas lus. Grâce à toi, grâce au *Théâtre Libre*, je puis enfin apprendre mon métier d’auteur dramatique, et voici en deux ans la deuxième pièce que tu me joues. Je tiens à t’en remercier publiquement.

“ BRIEUX.

“ 2 Février, 1892.”

Chapter III

From *Blanchette* to *La Robe Rouge*

1892-1900

THE plays of this decade are, in the main, attacks on various public institutions of society, all important parts of the social machinery.

Education—*Blanchette*.

Politics—*L'Engrenage*.

Charity—*Les Bienfaiteurs*.

Medicine—*L'Evasion*.

Justice—*La Robe Rouge*.

M. de Réboval, *La Couvée*, *L'Ecole des Belles-mères*, *Le Berceau*, all have a bearing on the more intimate institution of the family, and already indicate our author's preoccupation with the position of the child, attacking from this point of view the *liaison*, the fussiness of parents, the interference of mothers-in-law, and divorce. *Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont* deals with the institution of marriage.

After *Blanchette* M. Brieux was famous ; with *La Robe Rouge* he reaches the top of the tree and might have rested on his laurels had he so chosen.

BLANCHETTE. Comedy in three acts in prose. First played at the *Théâtre Libre*, February 2nd, 1892, and proved a great success. Later it was taken on tour.

Blanchette to La Robe Rouge 23

As it was one of the prime favourites of all the *Théâtre Libre* plays and a certain draw, it was revived by M. Antoine for the opening of the *Théâtre Antoine*, September 29th, 1897. In 1903 it was adopted by the *Comédie Française*, and was played there October 9th, 1903. Although it had already been performed in Paris about two hundred times at the *Théâtre Libre* and *Théâtre Antoine*, it was played at the *Comédie Française* eighteen times in 1903, six times in 1904, nine times in 1905, three times in 1906, and three times in 1907. *Blanchette* is the most successful of all the plays by M. Brieux excepting *Les Remplaçantes*. It is the play that made him famous. He is still referred to as "*l'auteur de Blanchette*."

Blanchette is the daughter of Père Rousset, who keeps a *cabaret* in a small country village. Her school successes had flattered the vanity of her parents, who, notwithstanding the pecuniary sacrifice, insisted upon her going on with her studies until she had obtained a teacher's certificate. And now, at eighteen, at the end of her course, she returns home, full of big ideas and with very different tastes from those of her humble parents. She is disgusted with their ignorance and vulgarity, whereas, to them and the neighbours, she is a miracle of wisdom. The parents delight in showing her off; their joy is beyond measure.

But the post of teacher "promised" by the Government is very long coming, and Père Rousset grudges bitterly the money he has spent. Blanchette, in putting into practice the "science" she has learnt, makes some terrific blunders, to the detriment of her father's crops. She refuses to debase herself by serving ordinary customers in the *cabaret*. At last Rousset gets exasperated; there is a scene, which ends in the departure of Blanchette.

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Rousset (avec un coup de poing sur la table). Elle fera ce que j'ai dit, ou elle s'en ira.

Blanchette Eh bien ! Je m'en irai.

And then she comes into contact with the harsh realities of life, or, at any rate, with the harsh realities of life as these are understood at the *Théâtre Libre*. This part of the play has been rewritten, the harsh realities softened, a sentimental, conventional ending substituted for the original one, which had more point. According to the original third act, *Blanchette* becomes a governess, a companion, etc., in various places, but always has to leave on account of the men in the family. Unable to find a post as teacher, she tries to earn her living by sewing, but does not get paid enough to keep herself. Finally, in despair, she becomes a prostitute.

The moral of it all is that the State is committing a crime in preparing more teachers than are necessary, unfitting girls of humble origin for life in their own station, and giving them nothing in return.

Blanchette is said to be the first French play dealing with the problem of popular education. The grievance aired is a real one. There is no doubt that the point of the play was one well worth making.

To what extent it has influenced public opinion it is impossible to say. The author has this end in view—"Je manifeste pour influencer le public." This to him is the purpose of playing.

Even granted that its influence has been nil, the play stands on its own merits, especially on the merits of the first two acts. Seldom has the life of humble folk been rendered on the stage so truly. M. Brieux is at his best when interpreting such people; he is most at home with them; he thoroughly understands their life and

their point of view. By a hundred significant little details, grouped with unobtrusive skill, he manages to convey a vivid sense of the reality of their lives, their surroundings, their *états d'âme*.

There is no singularity, no accident in the case of *Blanchette*. The close observation and skilful arrangement of details remains characteristic of the best work of M. Brieux. There is hardly a play which does not contain some humble character rendered to the life, some portrait worthy of standing beside Père Rousset ; le père Guernoche, the shepherd healer of *L'Evasion* ; le père-la-Joie in *Résultat des Courses* ; the peasants in *La Robe Rouge* and *Les Remplaçantes*—to mention only the most notable examples. To appreciate this fully the first two acts should be read entire.

M. Brieux is at home with the people, sympathises with them, and takes joy in interpreting their lives. Whereas people in the least degree *mondain* are almost foreigners to him. He is too *naïf* to see through the pose that hides the human insect struggling in its chrysalis. The *femme du monde* is a sealed book to him,¹ he, as a rule, fails to make her live ; sometimes the failure is more glaring than at others, but he never really succeeds. Human nature appeals to him most at its most human, at its most natural.

M. DE RÉBOVAL. Comedy in four acts in prose, originally called *M. le Sénateur*. First played September 15th, 1892, at the *Odéon*. Not a great success, played only twenty-two times. It has never been printed. M. Brieux said of it : “ Il y a deux actes que j'avouerais encore, mais le reste——” (here a shrug).

¹ Vide *L'Evasion* and *Les Remplaçantes*.

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The play begins at the château of M. le Sénateur, the Château de Mesnil, some distance from Paris. Mme. de Réboval is very ill—ill with grief, for she knows that her husband keeps a mistress, spends half his income on her, and has had by her one son, Paul Loindet, who passes for the natural son of a dead friend of M. de Réboval. But it must not be imagined that Réboval is a *débauché*; he is a great political figure and has a splendid public reputation for integrity—*un très honnête homme*. Mme. de Réboval is in despair at the prospect of her daughter Beatrice being ruined, for has not her husband just paid the gambling debts of Paul Loindet to the tune of 30,000 francs? Beatrice is a high-minded young lady, deeply touched by her mother's abandonment. She vows she will never marry, unless she meets an exceptional male, a veritable hero. M. de Réboval has just made a big official speech at the Senate and is expected to spend two days at the château with his wife, a thing which does not often happen. The way he greets his wife is eloquent of the man, pompous, official, correct, patronising—the great personage to the life:—

“ Bonjour, ma chère amie. Etes-vous mieux? J'ai rencontré le docteur . . . qui m'a promis de vous guérir. Ah, à propos, j'ai reçu des étoffes de Perse qui sont de toute beauté, je vous en enverrai.”

The conversation continues, cold and matter-of-fact for his part, while the women celebrate the occasion by making much of him.

This would-be agreeable family party is suddenly interrupted by a telegram calling him back to Paris—an imperative duty. Paul Loindet leaves that very night for *le Gabon*, on a special mission obtained from

the minister by Réboval. It is his duty to see Loindet before he leaves, and he cannot neglect his duty.

The second act is in Paris. Loindet, as he packs his trunks, confides his regrets for his past and his hopes for his future to Mademoiselle his mother, the mistress of Réboval. Réboval is announced ; his entrance is in exactly the same tone as in the first act.

“ Bonjour, ma chère amie.”

“ Comment va Mme. de Réboval ? ”

“ Merci, tout doucement, mais j’ai vu le docteur . . . qui m’a promis de la guérir. Ah, à propos, j’ai pensé à vous ; j’ai reçu des étoffes de Perse qui sont de toute beauté, je vous en enverrai.”

Loindet says good-bye to his protector, the severe but generous friend of his father ; promising to perform his duty like a man of honour in the new world to which he goes to make a fresh start, and M. de Réboval wipes the silent tear, filled with the consciousness of having performed his duty. Loindet departs and Réboval is just making himself comfortable in this his other home when a telegram comes from the château announcing that Mme. de Réboval’s condition is serious. M. le Sénateur excuses himself to his mistress in the same terms as to his wife—an imperative duty, etc.

Two years intervene. Mme. de Réboval is dead. M. de Réboval has married his mistress. Loindet has returned from Africa covered with glory—a veritable hero after the heart of Beatrice. He loves her, Beatrice adores him, but M. de Réboval forbids the marriage. Why ? Why ? and Why ? He is forced to explain that it is impossible, monstrous, that they are brother and sister. This scene is a very strong one, very well constructed, the best in the play according to some.

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The last act falls flat. Loindet questions his mother:—

“ Il faut que je sache si M. de Réboval a menti en disant qu’il était mon père. S’il a menti je puis épouser Beatrice.”

“ Il a dit vrai.”

The children turn on their parents for hiding the truth, for ruining their lives, railing at the hypocrisy and evil behind a correct exterior. M. de Réboval pleads extenuating circumstances (and there are extenuating circumstances, but it is not worth while going into these), asks pardon of his daughter, who throws herself into his arms before fleeing to a convent.

The first two acts, couched in the form of true comedy, are universally admired; then the tone of the play changes, becomes overstrained, melodramatic, and ends in flaming rhetoric.

This play has already been referred to as having “ a bearing on the more intimate institution of the family, already showing our author’s preoccupation with the position of the children, pointing out how this is affected by a *liaison*.”¹ This is only a part of the truth. The play is in effect an attack on the *bourgeois*; it shows the hollowness of what the *bourgeois* admires and looks up to. From one point of view (what, if we screw our imagination to the sticking-place, we might call the plebeian point of view) existing social institutions are based upon a platform, a *bourgeois* platform, made up to a large extent of compromise, for the sake of material comfort. Réboval is a type of the successful *bourgeois*, a great man, a great public man, and M. Brieux says, smiling at first—No, he is ridiculous, in an absurd

¹ cf. p. 22.

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position ; then sharply—No, he is a dishonest, cruel man ; then, at the top of his voice at last—No, he is a miserable wretch who ought to beg for pardon. The attack on the *bourgeois* is implicit rather than direct, but it must be remembered that the author of *M. de Réboval* is a *Théâtre Libre* man.¹ M. Brioux is not a socialist partisan, he appeals here for no progressive measure, rather he goes back to the nearest common point of departure, to a moral cleanliness and simplicity that has gone out of fashion, to a mode of life that fundamentally accords with the dictates of Christian morality.

LA COUVÉE. Comedy in three acts. First played in a private club in Rouen in 1893 ; first public performance in Paris at the *Co-opération des Idées, Université populaire du Faubourg Saint Antoine*, July 9th, 1903.

This comedy is interesting as a study of life in a provincial town, such as Rouen. It is a satire on the fussy interference of parents in the lives of their children, of the hen who cannot allow "the brood" to stray from under her wing.

In the last act the respective mothers-in-law clash. After this explosion everything is made up ; it is admitted that the chickens are big enough to be allowed to live :—

"La couvée a grandi ; les petits s'envolent."

It is agreeable and amusing enough. The clash of the mothers-in-law is repeated word for word in *L'Ecole des Belles-mères*.²

¹ What this implies may be gathered from the description of the *Théâtre Libre* by M. Jules Lemaître quoted p. 104.

² cf. p. 51.

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So far, in spite of the success of *Blanchette*, none of the plays by M. Brieux are completely satisfying, whether it is that he is working to a pattern (the *Théâtre Libre* pattern to some extent) which does not suit his talent, or whether he is not yet completely master of his means and method. The next play, *L'Engrenage*, is more satisfying.

L'ENGRENAGE. Comedy in three acts. Played for the first time by the *Cercle des Escholiers* (at the *Théâtre de la Comédie Parisienne*), May 16th, 1894. It was so highly approved of by good judges, so many expressed a wish to see it on the public stage, that it was revived a few weeks later at the *Théâtre des Nouveautés*, June 4th,¹ 1894, and was there performed twenty-one times.

Rémoussin, a manufacturer in a small country town, a self-made man, honest and anxious to do good, is persuaded, in spite of himself, to go into politics. After a good deal of pressure on the part of his wife, his daughter, and his son-in-law, and of Morin, a "Sénateur Scapin," he consents to stand for election, but on condition that the campaign is to be free from any of the usual corrupt practices, that his ideas must be respected, and that no compromise or concession is to be made for the sake of his election. The inevitable happens. He is forced to make one compromise after another, he is caught in the political machine. He undertakes to do the very opposite of what he feels to be right, and his friends go further still in what they promise for him.

He is elected. He leaves his works and his home, goes to Paris, and quickly degenerates from bad to worse.

¹ An error in the printed edition gives June 1st.

His position, his growing influence, go to his head, and the changes in the new environment are so gradual, they come about by such easy transitions, that he has not the slightest idea that he is being demoralised. He is merely changing his opinion as a wise man should ; one cannot always be right, especially in a provincial town where no one ever gets things at first hand. Thus, without his knowledge, he gets more and more caught in the *engrenage*.

During his absence the works do not do so well ; his expenditure, naturally enough, has increased rapidly ; the well-to-do, honest man finds himself in financial difficulties before he knows it. As luck will have it there is a big deal going on. The promoters of the Simplon tunnel are getting the Government to buy them out for a mere trifle of a hundred million francs, and they must know who are their friends when it comes to the vote. The Marquis de Storn calls on Rémoussin and explains the situation, shows him the balance sheet to be approved, and, in departing, casually leaves a cheque for 25,000 francs on the table. Rémoussin perceives it and calls him back.

“ Reprenez-moi ça ! Je ne me vends pas.”

Mme. Rémoussin happens to come in just in time to help out the explanatory Marquis de Storn.

Storn. Venez à mon secours, Madame. M. Rémoussin refuse de m'associer à vos bonnes œuvres.

And of course it is not corruption, in fact, it is the usual thing.

Storn. Quoi de plus simple ? cela se fait. Vos collègues ont accepté. . . .

Rémoussin. Du moment que cela se fait.

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It is not to buy his vote, since he has always been favourable to the deal. He accepts the money on behalf of needy charities in his *arrondissement*. Nor does he realise that he has been caught and crushed by the machine until Morin slaps him on the back as he says—

“ Je viens de rencontrer Storn ; il m’a dit que vous êtes favorable au rachat du Simplon. Allons, mon cher, vous êtes dans le mouvement ! ”

Punishment comes quickly ; the scandal is out, lists of the “ *chequards* ” are published. Rémoussin, in his anger, accuses Morin of drawing him into the sphere of corruption.

“ Sans vous je serais resté ce que j’étais, un honnête homme. ”

Morin. Un honnête homme ! Allons donc ! plus hypocrite que nous, voilà tout. Est-ce que c’est moi qui vous ai envoyé chez le ministre en solliciteur ? Est-ce que c’est moi qui ai fait votre discours sur les blés ? Est-ce que c’est moi qui ai touché votre chèque ?

Rémoussin is obliged to acknowledge the truth of this, recognises his responsibility, curses the day he entered politics, and bursts into tears at the thought of what he has been brought to, so that even Morin is touched and comforts him as well as he can. Rémoussin begs his family to forgive him ; he feels guilty towards them :

“ Il n’y a qu’un moyen de rentrer dans l’estime de soi-même et du monde. Je vais le prendre, ”

and he goes out without any explanation. As soon as he has left a telegram arrives to say that the whole affair is to be hushed up by the Government, the “ *chequards* ” are not to be sued. Everyone is over-

joyed. Amid the universal rejoicings Rémoussin returns. He has made good, he has done his duty, he has written to *Le Reveil* to acknowledge his dishonesty, he has sent in his resignation to the President of the Chamber, he has returned the 25,000 francs to the Attorney-General. He owes no one a farthing, he can hold up his head once more, he is an honest man again.

Morin makes his escape before he can be contaminated. Rémoussin is covered with reproaches from the family ; the crowd without gather beneath his windows to shout, "*Le voleur ! Démission !*"

Rémoussin tries to make a speech, to explain to them, but they shout him down and throw stones at him. In the distance is heard the voice of Morin :

"Ce que je veux c'est le bonheur du peuple, de ce peuple intelligent et fier."

"Vive Morin ! Vive Morin !"

The play ends ironically. It is an effective satire on politics as they are carried on under the present system of universal suffrage. M. Brieux has held aloof from politics, but he is not cynically indifferent. His general attitude is clearly shown in the *Discours de Réception* at the Academy sixteen years after the production of this play.

"La première partie de Ciquette montre également quelle sympathie il [Halevy] éprouvait pour ce peuple parisien si ignoré, si calomnié, dont le plus grand défaut et le moins signalé est la vanité qu'ont fait naître et qu'ont développée en lui la flatterie des politiciens. Tant de promesses non réalisées, tant de beaux rêves suivis de réveils sans soulagements, tant d'efforts qui paraissent inutiles ont suscité dans nos faubourgs

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l'idée que le suffrage universel a fait faillite, ou du moins qu'il n'a, comme toutes les révolutions, profité qu'à la classe bourgeoise. C'est par un mode de groupement d'où la politique est exclue, par l'action syndicale, puissante dès ses débuts, mystérieuse et inquiétante dans son avenir, que le peuple désabusé, résolu à ne plus compter que sur lui-même, entend désormais arriver, sans secours supérieur, à la conquête de sa place au soleil. Puisse-t-il ne pas voir surgir de ses propres rangs des chefs qui deviendront des maîtres, puisse-t-il ne pas s'apercevoir un jour qu'il aura seulement déplacé la tyrannie en cherchant la liberté."

The ironical ending of *L'Engrenage* is very different from anything the three preceding plays can show, and it can hardly be disputed that this style suits M. Brieux much better. Not that he has shaken off the *Théâtre Libre* influence for all time; it clings to him almost throughout his career, and every now and then comes into evidence; but in this play he has laid it aside and is very much his own man. He has done what he wanted to do and has thoroughly enjoyed doing it.

"Je manifeste pour influencer le public" is the truth, but it is not the whole truth. It is also true that M. Brieux takes the satirist's joy in catching and rendering human folly. It would be hard to draw up the manifesto of this play, harder to trace its influence on the public. He wrote this play because he is a playwright, rather than because he is a missionary. He has the "*don*" (pace Zola):

"Je sais tout ce qui manque à *L'Engrenage* de M. Brieux pour être une grande comédie politique, mais c'est une œuvre saine et forte qui, après *Blanchette*, après *M. de Réboval*, nous confirme dans l'idée que nous

nous étions faite de l'auteur. Il est né pour le théâtre, c'est un de nos espérances."¹

Sarcey's opinion in such matters is as good as another's. *L'Engrenage* is not a perfect play. Sarcey hints at superficiality of observation and "*scènes à faire*" that have been left out. It is a pity that Sarcey was not more explicit. Apparently it is not a masterpiece, but it is good enough; it is one of the characteristic plays of M. Brieux, more essentially a part of the man's work than anything that has preceded it, and than much that is to follow it.

LA ROSE BLEUE is not one of the characteristic plays; it is a trifle, specially written to show off an infant prodigy. The subject is the "*rapprochement*" of an elderly couple who belong to the *grand-monde*, the infant prodigy playing gooseberry. It might have been written by anybody; it might be performed at any Academy for young ladies. As a matter of fact, it was performed at Geneva at the *Grand Théâtre*, July 20th, 1895, as a comedy-vaudeville in one act.

LES BIENFAITEURS. Comedy in four acts. Played for the first time in Paris at the *Théâtre de la Porte St. Martin*, October 22nd, 1896, and was played only twelve times.

It is a satire on organised charity as it is carried on by people (chiefly women) who have nothing else to do. Such a subject could hardly be to the taste of a *Porte St. Martin* audience. It was not a success; M. Brieux has made his point in a way—he has raised a question rather than solved a problem.

¹ Francisque Sarcey. *Le Temps*, Lundi, 4 Juin, 1894.

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In collaboration with Henri, *fiancé* of his little cousin Georgette, Landrecy has invented an electric accumulator. Being a generous optimist, not to say Utopian, he would like to start a factory on a co-operative basis. Wages of the workmen are to be increased, and he dreams of founding all kinds of institutions—homes, schools, etc.—if only he had the money! His wife Pauline is more charitably inclined than her husband, if that were possible—and, if only she had the money——!

Hereupon Valentin Salviat, her long-lost brother, turns up from Africa in the nick of time, as rich as Cræsus. He is only too ready to empty his overloaded purse at their feet so soon as he discovers their dreams. Secretly, he promises himself some fun over their disillusioning, and he loves "*la petite Georgette*" and hopes thus to please her. (The sentimental theme is quite unimportant, no further reference will be made to it.)

And now we come to the real meat of the play—the under-side of Society charitable organisations, into which the beautiful dreams of the Landrecys soon degenerate. The conventional charity, made up of committees, patronesses, routine and condescension to the poor, automatically substitutes itself for their generous imaginings. The machine of charity takes hold of the Landrecys (just as the machine of politics took hold of Rémoussin), grinds all the humanity out of their aims, until nothing is left but a cold, cruel system. It is impossible to tell the story of this; there is no action in the ordinary sense of the word; scene after scene of telling satirical power—slices of life—picture the wily hypocrisy of the professional pauper, the inanity of committees, the vain folly of patronesses, the tragedy

of help withheld because regulations and conditions had not been fulfilled, and (even worse) indifference to human suffering. Here are two selections, let them speak for themselves :—

Act II, Scene 16. The Committee meets. After some difficulty the usual feminine conversation is dominated sufficiently for business to proceed.

Mme. le Catelier (debout). Mesdames—Messieurs—Grâce à l'initiative de Mme. Landrécy, nous avons pu réunir dans une sorte de syndicat amical toutes les présidentes des diverses œuvres de charité de notre ville. Contrairement à ce qui se passe trop souvent ailleurs, nous avons pu faire l'union de ces sociétés sans distinction politique ou religieuse. Nous avons mis en commun une partie de nos capitaux et toutes nos bonnes volontés. Les résultats, sans être extraordinaires, ont été satisfaisants. Mme. la secrétaire va vous lire le rapport sur les opérations de cette première année. Avant de lui donner la parole je vous demande la permission de vous remercier toutes et tous pour votre zèle et dévouement. (*Petits applaudissements de mains jointes.*) La parole est à Mme. la secrétaire.

Mme. Destourmel. Mesdames et Messieurs, Dans notre temps de scepticisme et de doute, un homme s'est trouvé qui——

(*Personne n'écoute. Les conversations particulières ont repris, elles couvrent la voix de Mme. Destourmel qui lit, pendant tout ce qui suit, un interminable rapport, hérissé de chiffres. Sentant bien qu'on ne l'écoute pas, Mme. Destourmel a d'ailleurs peu à peu baissé la voix et lit pour elle, par devoir. Tout le monde parle à la fois, modes, théâtres.*)

Brouhaha ! Entre Georgette très troublée. Elle vient auprès de Pauline et lui parle bas à l'oreille. Pauline se trouble à son tour et l'amène sur le devant de la scène.)

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Pauline (bas à Georgette). Ah ! les pauvres gens ! Et personne n'était venu à leur secours ?

Georgette. Personne.

Pauline. Viens ! *(Elle sort par la droite et revient presque aussitôt avec un chapeau et un manteau. On s'en aperçoit—"Qu'est-ce qu'il y a ?"—"Je ne sais pas."* *Pauline va vers Mme. Le Catelier, lui dit deux mots tout bas et sort avec Georgette qui l'attendait auprès de la porte. Un silence s'est fait.)*

Mme. Le Catelier. Mesdames, Mme. Landrécy est appelée au dehors pour une affaire de la plus haute importance.

Plusieurs voix (timidement). Peut-on savoir ?

Mme. Le Catelier. Je sais que cette affaire concerne les œuvres et rien de plus. Mme. Landrécy vous prie de l'attendre. Mme. la secrétaire va continuer la lecture de son rapport.

Mme. Destourmel. J'ai terminé, Madame.

(Petit colloque entre Mme. Le Catelier et Mme. Destourmel. Pendant ce temps animation dans les groupes.)

Mme. Le Catelier (sonnette). Mesdames, je mets aux voix les conclusions du rapport. *(Toutes les mains se lèvent.)* Avis contraire ? Le rapport est adopté. *(Sonnette.)* Quelqu'un a-t-il une communication à faire à l'assemblée ?

Mme. Paillencourt. Ah ! oui—j'allais oublier. *(Elle cherche une lettre dans son ridicule.)* Je demande la parole.

Mme. Le Catelier. La parole est à Mme. Paillencourt.

Mme. Paillencourt (cherchant sa lettre, en lit une autre). "La moindre offrande sera accueillie avec reconnaissance." Ce n'est pas ça—On en reçoit tant de ces lettres—Ah ! voici ! c'est une demande de secours qui nous a été envoyée il y a quelques jours. Elle est conçue dans les termes habituels avec une menace de

suicide. Je crois (*elle relit*)—Oui : “ Si Dieu nous abandonne nous chercherons un refuge dans la mort— ” Signé “ Naclette, rue aux Juifs.” Voilà !

Mme. Le Catelier. On fera prendre des renseignements. (*Elle donne la lettre à Mme. Destourmel.*)

Mme. Destourmel. C'est à deux pas. J'irai aujourd'hui, ou demain.

But the threat of suicide was no vain one, and this was why Pauline was called out : and as she comes back with her “ Mesdames, Mesdames, un malheur, un grand malheur— ” the *bourgeois* platform cracks and reveals the yawning abyss beneath.

In order to suggest the range of the play the other selection shall be of a totally different nature—the episode of Féchain le régénéré, Act II, Scene 8, and Act III, Scene 2.

Act II, Scene 8. (Entre Féchain, pauvre mais très proprement mis.)

Mme. Guerlot (bas à Pauline). Regardez-moi Féchain, comme il trouve moyen d'être propre avec le peu de secours qu'on lui alloue—

Pauline (bas). N'est-ce-pas ? C'est une bonne fortune pour une œuvre d'avoir un pauvre aussi bien tenu. (*Haut*) Approchez, Féchain.

Féchain. Mesdames ! (*Salutations dignes.*)

Pauline. Mon ami, votre bienfaiteur, M. Valentin Salviat, a témoigné le desir de vous voir. Je vous en avais prévenu.

Féchain. Je suis à vos ordres et aux siens, Mme. la présidente. Je n'aurai qu'un regret, c'est de ne pas pouvoir lui dire, comme il conviendrait, toute ma reconnaissance.

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Mme. Guerlot (bas à Pauline). Et il s'exprime avec une correction !

Pauline (de même). Il est admirable. (*Haut*) M. Valentin Salviat vous questionnera peut-être sur votre passé—Je m'en excuse pour lui—Vous ne vous troublerez pas ?

Féchain. Non, Madame.

Pauline. Qu'est-ce-que vous lui direz ?

Féchain. J'y ai déjà pensé, Mme. la présidente. Je lui dirai toutes mes fautes, et comment—

Pauline. Oui—mais, voulez-vous, voulez-vous parler—comme si j'étais M. Valentin Salviat ?

Féchain. Parfaitement, Mme. la présidente. (*Un temps*) Père de cinq enfants, j'eus le malheur de me laisser tenter par le bien d'autrui, j'eus un instant d'oubli et je fus condamné par la justice de mon pays pour abus de confiance et vol avec effraction. (*Coups d'œil admiratifs entre Mme. Guerlot et Pauline.*) Après avoir subi le châtiment mérité de ma faute je serais retombé fatalement dans le vice, si Dieu—(*se reprenant*)—si ma bonne étoile—

Mme. Guerlot. Vous pouvez dire Dieu. (*Bas à Pauline*) N'est-ce-pas ? Y voyez-vous un inconvénient ?

Pauline. Du tout.

Féchain. Si Dieu n'avait mis sur ma route deux admirables dames—

Pauline (doucement). Oh ! Oh !

Féchain. Est-ce-qu'il ne faut pas ?

Mme. Guerlot. Mais si, mais si.

Féchain. Deux admirables dames qui me ramenèrent dans le bon chemin. Depuis je suis rentré dans ma famille et j'y vivrais au milieu d'un bonheur modeste, mais complet, si la santé de ma pauvre femme ne laissait à désirer.

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Pauline. C'est parfait—Elle est encore malade, votre femme ?

Mme. Guerlot. Vous ne l'aviez pas dit.

Féchain. C'est que je suis honteux d'avoir aussi souvent recours à l'inépuisable bonté—Ah ! si mes battements de cœur ne m'interdisaient pas tout travail. *(Il essuie une larme. Pauline, se détournant, prend une pièce dans son portemonnaie.)*

Pauline *(bas, à Mme. Guerlot).* Dix francs ?

Mme. Guerlot. Oui.

Pauline. Tenez, mon ami.

Féchain. Non, Mme. la présidente, non, vraiment !

Pauline. Allons—Allons !

Féchain *(acceptant).* C'est trop ! C'est trop !

Act III, Scene 2. Pauline. Entrez ! *(Entre Féchain.)* Ah, c'est vous—*(au domestique)* Prévenez M. Salviat que je l'attends. *(Le domestique sort.)*

Féchain *(il est légèrement gris).* Bonjour, Mme. la présidente—Il n'est pas là, mon bienfaiteur ?

Pauline. Il va venir. Attendez.

Féchain. Voulez-vous me permettre de m'asseoir ? Parce que je ne sais si c'est mes battements de cœur, mais je vois tout tourner—Ainsi vous, j'veus vois monter au plafond et puis redescendre. Ça m'donne des étourdissements.

Pauline *(étonnée).* Asseyez-vous. *(A part)* Si je ne le connaissais pas comme je le connais, je jurerais qu'il est gris.

Féchain *(s'asseyant tout près de la table).* Ecoutez—Mme. la présidente.

Pauline. Mais vous sentez l'alcöol !

Féchain. Ça doit être parce que je me suis frictionné

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avant de venir—J'étais souffrant. Et si ça n'avait pas été pour vous, savez, je me serais pas dérangé. Seulement je vous ai entendu dire à l'autre dame—que vous n'aviez qu'un régénéré à montrer à mon bienfaiteur, alors j'ai pas voulu qu'vous soyez l'bec dans l'eau.

Pauline. Vous êtes ivre, mon ami. Allez-vous-en.

Féchain (debout). Moi, j'ai rien de rien.

Pauline. Vous ne pouvez pas vous tenir debout. Vous empestez l'alcôol. Je vous dis de vous en aller.

Féchain. Ça se voit donc ? Ecoutez, Madame, faut qu'ça soit le grand air, parce qu'en sortant du—de chez le—chose, j'étais frais comme votre œil.

Pauline. Allez-vous-en !

Féchain. Non. J'veux pas vous mettre dans l'embarras—Ça va se passer—Je me connais, ça va s'passer. Vous verrez, mon bienfaiteur ne s'apercevra de rien—Père de cinq enfants, j'eus le malheur de me laisser tenter par le bien d'autrui—

Pauline. Si vous ne voulez pas sortir de bonne volonté, je vais appeler Jean qui vous mettra dehors.

Féchain. Soyez donc tranquille, j'vous dis—j'veux pas qu'vous soyez dans l'embarras à cause de moi—

Entre Valentin Salviat.

Féchain (à part). Le v'là, mon bienfaiteur. M'sieu, c'est moi qui suis le régénéré.

Salviat (à Pauline, riant). Ah ! Ah ! mais—mais—il est saoul, le régénéré.

Pauline. Hélas ! Il était si bien hier matin.

Féchain. Père de cinq enfants, j'eus le malheur de me laisser tenter par le bien d'autrui—

Salviat. Tu est saoul, mon bonhomme.

Féchain. —par le bien d'autrui—j'eus un instant d'oubli, et je fus condamné par la justice de mon pays.

Salviat. Tais-toi, ou je te flanque par la fenêtre.

Féchain. Oui, mon bienfaiteur.

Pauline (à Salviat). J'ai honte, vraiment.

Salviat. Bah ! tu ne vas pas te désoler pour ça—un homme saoul—j'en ai vu bien d'autres. Celui-là sera peut-être amusant ; nous allons le faire causer.

Féchain. Père de cinq enfants—j'eus le malheur—

Salviat. Tu vas avoir le malheur de recevoir une raclée si tu ne m'obéis pas. Tu parleras quand on t'interrogera.

Féchain. Oui, mon bienfaiteur.

Salviat. Debout !

Féchain (désolé). J'tiendrais pas, mon bienfaiteur.

Salviat (riant). Et puis ne m'appelle plus ton bienfaiteur. Si je l'ai jamais été, je ne le suis plus—Pourquoi ne travailles-tu pas ?

Féchain. C'est rapport à mes battements de cœur.

Salviat. Ah ! ah ! ah ! (*Il lui donne une grande claque sur l'épaule.*) Des battements de cœur ! Allons, ne te moque pas de moi.

Féchain. J'ai un certificat de médecin.

Salviat (s'asseyant). Tu continues. Tu as tort. Ce que tu fais en ce moment, c'est une escroquerie. Si tu ne me dis pas toute la vérité—Tu sais ce que c'est que la prison, n'est-ce-pas ?

Féchain. Non, M'sieu.

Salviat. Comment, non, M'sieu ! Tu n'as donc pas été condamné par la justice de ton pays—comme tu dis ?

Féchain (regardant Pauline). Si ?

Salviat. Tu n'as pas fait la peine ? (*Il ne répond pas.*) Si tu ne réponds pas, je te fais empoigner en sortant d'ici.

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Féchain (regardant Pauline). C'est que——

Salviat. Allons, tu as perdu la langue à présent ? Ça t'embête de raconter tout ça devant madame parce que tu lui as menti.

Féchain. Oui, M'sieu.

Salviat. Tu lui as bien avoué que tu avais volé ?

Féchain. J'ai jamais volé.

Pauline. Vous n'avez jamais volé ! J'ai votre casier judiciaire !

Féchain (pleurant). C'est pas l'mien, Madame.

Salviat. Elle est bonne ! Raconte-nous ça depuis le commencement.

Féchain. B'en, voilà !—Je n'm'appelle pas Féchain. Féchain c'était le nom du mari de ma femme d'à-present, qui est donc veuve. Quand on est arrivé ici, parole, j'avais envie de travailler. Seulement, qu'est-ce-que vous voulez, le travail, moi, j'peux pas supporter ça—Ça va bien deux jours—trois jours—et puis après, bonsoir. Alors, quand on a su qu'il y avait une société pour les régénérés, qu'on a su ce que c'était, ma femme m'a passé les papiers de son homme—et puis, voilà !

The co-operative factory of Landrécy fares no better than the charity organisations of his wife. In spite of all Landrecy has done for the men they threaten to strike unless he takes back a workman dismissed for insubordination. When everything has gone sufficiently wrong, Salviat turns up, preaches a sermon on the folly of it all, and retires from the position of suitor to Georgette in order that she may marry the young man she loves. The ending is very tame.

Nothing is easier to say than that M. Brieux has solved no problem ;¹ it is open to question whether he

¹ Puis il, Salviat, profite pour faire aux Landrécy's une petite conférence, un peu bien anodine, sur cette vérité trop connue,

thought of trying to solve one. The problem here is the greatest of all social problems, the problem of poverty. Is it not another attack on the social hypocrisy of the *Bourgeois*, with his liberal ideals in one hand and his complacency in the other, while the social problem remains untouched? The essence of his preaching is that we must understand each other, poor and rich, that we must realise the position of affairs in order to cope with them. If only we would try to realise the position and try to understand each other instead of making fools of ourselves and of each other, instead of going on in the present way, where the rich complacently dupe themselves and demoralise the poor, where the poor take a certain delight in fooling the charity-mongers, and where the real evil goes untouched. Whether it has had any influence it is impossible to say, but the play, in spite of its faults, and because of its merits, is very much worth while.

L'ÉVASION. Comedy in three acts. Played for the first time December 7th, 1896, at the *Comédie Française*; given thirteen times in December, 1896, thirty-eight times in 1897, five times in 1898; the first play by M. Brioux produced at the *Comédie Française*; crowned by the Academy.

Doctor Bertry is a successful physician, honoured and ambitious for more honours yet. Believing thoroughly

que la façon de donner vaut mieux que ce qu'on donne. Et je crois ma parole qu'il a la prétention d'apprendre au public que la charité sera bien plus profitable si elle s'exerçait sans le secours d'intermédiaires. Nous qui avons un instant espéré que M. Brioux allait résoudre la question sociale! Piètre conclusion d'une pièce remplie de talent. (*Les Annales*, 1909. Article on *Les Bienfaiteurs*, pp. 190 et seq.)

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in advertisement, he is busy on his biography, assisted by his assistant, La Belleuse ; he writes himself down as one of the medical celebrities of the age, and especially plumes himself on his great work, "*douze volumes chez Alcan*," dealing with the subject of heredity, going beyond Lucas, Morel, Galton, in proving the invincible force of its laws. In spite of all his science he cannot cure himself. He is at heart a quack, and a tyrannical quack. Jean Belmont, his stepson, is doomed to commit suicide (according to the Bertry theory of heredity) because his father was a hypochondriac and committed suicide. Lucienne Bertry, niece to the doctor, is doomed to an immoral life because her mother was a courtesan. The romance brewing between Lucienne and Belmont has to fight its way against the imperious dictates of "science." But the two prisoners escape together ; summoning up sufficient will-power they defy "science" and marry, Jean, unconscious of the humour of it, threatening to kill himself unless Bertry consents. Bertry yields, but only to the threat, and still clings to his dogma. The test comes when Lucienne, now the wife of Belmont, is made love to by Paul de Maucourt. She is for a while fascinated by the terror of her heredity, but her love for her husband tells in the end, for Maucourt is a "*goujat*." Meanwhile Jean has grown fat on good food and country air and his melancholia disappears. The play closes ironically, Bertry, near the agony, pulling himself together to keep up appearances and get through a public speech.

There is some admirable satire on the medical profession,¹ there are some splendid bits of character

¹ "Ce qui est excellent dans la pièce de M. Brieux c'est le cadre, c'est la partie satirique. Je ne dis pas que cela vaille du

painting (*le père Guernoché*, the shepherd-healer, is a telling part, created by Coquelin cadet), but it is not a good play. It is not well focussed. It is not satisfied with being a satire on the medical profession, it is an attempt to do what M. Curel has done better in *La Nouvelle Idole*—an attempt to dethrone science from its arrogant position as successor to religion. M. Curel is not the dramatist that M. Brioux is, but he is more the man of ideas ; he can handle ideas better ; he has chosen a better instance of the arrogance of science. What serious member of the medical profession would dream of maintaining the attitude of Bertry ? He is only a charlatan, an imbecile, whereas the doctor in *La Nouvelle Idole* is an enthusiastic specialist, a martyr to his work. *L'Evasion* is an attack on charlatanism, it is not an attack on science. Charlatanism and science cannot be hit by the same stone.

L'Evasion, one of the least satisfying plays by M. Brioux, was crowned by the Academy ; it is even an irritating play, irritating in the same way as *Ménages d'Artistes*. The attack on science is as puerile as the attack on the Symbolist poets ; it is only an attitude taken for the moment ; it is by no means part of the author's creed ; indeed, it has been completely forgotten in *Les Avariés* and the second version of *Maternité*, where a medical specialist is the *porte-parole* of the author.

LES TROIS FILLES DE MONSIEUR DUPONT. Comedy in four acts. Played for the first time, October 8th, 1897,

Molière, attendu que je n'en sais rien, mais je crois que c'est la plus franche et la plus vivante satire qu'on ait faite de la médecine et des médecins depuis Molière." (Lemaître, *Impressions*, Xme Série, p. 52.)

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in Paris, at the *Théâtre du Gymnase*; played fifty-nine times in 1897.

This play ranks with *La Robe Rouge* and *Les Remplaçantes* as one of the three great plays by M. Brieux. It is one of the three plays chosen for the introductory volume of the English translations for which Mr. Shaw stands sponsor. An extract from it (Act I, Scene 5) is to be found in the *Anthologie du Théâtre Contemporain*. It is one of the plays by which M. Brieux must be judged. It is a "play unpleasant," but not after the *Théâtre Libre* pattern; the pattern is the pattern of M. Brieux. M. Dupont is a small printer in a small provincial town. He is very anxious to marry off his daughter Julie. He has two other daughters by his first wife—Caroline, who has remained single and become *dévoté*, Angèle, who has remained single and is now a prosperous prostitute in Paris. But Julie—Julie is to be married! and M. Dupont sets about the business with all his business instincts alert, determined to swindle the other party to the deal, the mother of Antonin Mairaut. The business duel goes on between Mairaut *mère* and Dupont *père*. Nothing could be more biting than this satire on what the institution of marriage has come to be under the system of the *dot* and paternal authority. Dupont has his eye upon the uncle of Mairaut, "*l'oncle Maréchal*," a wealthy man who must leave all he has to Antonin, and who, from his official position, can flood the *imprimerie* Dupont with official orders. Is Antonin the right husband for Julie? Stuff and nonsense, of course he is! The deal comes off. This first act is as fine as anything M. Brieux has ever done. I refrain from quoting only because it is accessible to English readers. M. Dupont agrees to give thirty thousand

francs and his house at Saint Laurent. Antonin has only his prospects of being heir to "*l'oncle Maréchal*." The union thus brought about is an abomination—the husband a heartless sensualist with an economical distaste for children, the wife a romanesque, high-spirited girl whose one hope for salvation lies in her children. She is disillusioned, demoralised, degraded, and both parties to the deal have their eyes opened. The maison de Saint Laurent is flooded and uninhabitable, while *l'oncle Maréchal* turns out to be a ruined man, having lost all his fortune in the Panama bubble. But the real centre of interest is Julie.

Things go from bad to worse, her every feeling is outraged—a pitiful story told with relentless truth—until the explosion comes brutally enough at the end of the third act and Julie leaves her husband. Nothing quite like this had been given before to the French stage. It is not the dreary, morbid pessimism of the *Théâtre Libre* that prompts this work; it is too vitally honest, too profoundly true; only a man of strong faith could dare to paint such a picture.

And what is Julie to do? Which is the better off—Julie, Caroline, or Angèle? These questions are raised in the last act when the sisters are brought together, and Julie, submitting to her fate, returns to the man she loathes, crushed by the machine. What other possibilities are there in a woman's life under such a system?

Apart from the value of the manifesto, the play is a great play—missionary and dramatist are fused into one.

"La nouvelle pièce de M. Brieux, *Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont*, est une remarquable comédie de mœurs.

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Elle me paraît, et de beaucoup, la meilleure qu'il ait faite jusqu'ici, la moins didactique de forme, la plus riche d'observation, et la plus émouvante.

“ Les grands sujets traînent—on n'a qu'à prendre. Mais il y faut en même temps de la foi et de la force ; assez de candeur pour ne pas craindre d'être banal, et assez de talent pour ne l'être pas. Avec une confiance qui persiste et une habileté croissante, M. Brieux poursuit au théâtre la revue des ‘ questions sociales, ’ qui est aussi la revue des travers, vices, erreurs et plaies de notre démocratie. Il nous avait montré le malheur des filles que l'instruction décline, la corruption des électeurs et des élus par le suffrage universel, l'hypocrisie et l'insuffisance des institutions philanthropiques, le mal que put faire la superstition de la science. Tout cela est fort bien. Mais il a rencontré, cette fois, un sujet plus palpitant encore, s'il se peut, et d'un intérêt encore plus vital—c'est à savoir ce qu'il advient des filles pauvres dans la bourgeoisie contemporaine, où un abominable usage ne permet point aux jeunes filles de se marier sans dot. C'est bien simple ; ou elles tournent mal, ou elles ne se marient pas, ou elles se marient mal. Et dans le fond, celles qui se marient mal, ou qui ne se marient pas, ne tournent pas mieux que celles qui ont mal tourné.

Telles sont les vérités dont la comédie de M. Brieux est la démonstration.

Le dernier acte des Trois Filles de M. Dupont n'est décidément qu'une ‘ pessimisterie. ’ La pièce finirait sur une impression atroce si elle ne finissait sur une sensation d'artifice. Ici, d'ailleurs, le didactisme, l'espèce de ‘ c.q.f.d. ’ cher à l'auteur reparaît un peu trop. . . . Mais avec tout cela, la pièce dans son ensemble est merveilleusement vivante et comme foisonnante. Le talent de M. Brieux croît d'année en année, et ce talent me ravit, parce que ce n'est un talent ni d'humaniste, ni d'auteur mondain, et qu'il s'y trouve, à la fois, de l'ingénuité et de la pénétration, de la probité et de la malice, du réalisme et de l'idéologie, du bonhomme

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Richard et du Schopenhauer, de la maîtrise et un trouble, une incertitude extrêmement intéressante dans sa sincérité. Et quel bon type, quel type de haute comédie vraiment, que M. Dupont ! Sans compter tout ce que j'oublie." (Lemaître, *Impressions*, Xme Série, p. 278.)

L'ECOLE DES BELLES-MÈRES. Comedy in one act. Played for the first time in Paris, at the *Théâtre du Gymnase*, March 25th, 1898.

The subject of the play is obvious from the title. To a great extent it is a repetition of the last act of *La Couvée*. (See page 29.)

RÉSULTAT DES COURSES. Comedy in five acts and six tableaux. First played at the *Théâtre Antoine*, Paris, December 9th, 1898; performed twenty-six times in 1898, twenty-seven times in 1899.

The action of this play is situated among the working classes of Paris, from which M. Brioux has risen. To gather the necessary information, to get the necessary detail and atmosphere, he disguised himself as a workman and entered an *atelier*. But he was soon discovered.

A l'heure de l'apéritif il se rendit avec les camarades chez le mastroquet. Il monta sur une table :—

"Mes amis," dit-il, "je vous ai trompés, je ne suis pas ciseleur, je suis auteur dramatique.

Je m'appelle Eugène Brioux et j'ai fait jouer des pièces dont vous avez, peut-être, entendu parler—Les Bien-faiteurs, Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont, Blanchette."

Un assistant qui était lettré murmura : "Parbleu ! si nous connaissons Blanchette !"

Brioux explained what he was there for :

"Au moins, vous nous inviterez à la première——"

"Vous y serez !"

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Quand le rideau se leva sur la répétition générale tout l'atelier était dans la salle ; c'est devant cet auditoire sympathique et frémissant que le drame déroula ses péripéties. " J'ai ressenti, ce soir-là," m'a dit Brieux, " la plus profonde ivresse qu'il m'ait été donné d'éprouver. J'aime mieux mes ciseleurs que les abonnés de la Comédie Française." ¹

That he never lost this sympathy with the Paris plebs is demonstrated by his expressions on several occasions, notably in his *Discours* at the Academy, May 12th, 1910.

" Messieurs, je ne manque pas assez de modestie pour ignorer que mon rêve d'enfant (his election to the Academy) serait resté un rêve, si je n'avais offert à votre bienveillance que mes seuls mérites littéraires. Et . . . j'explique ma présence ici par l'intention que vous avez eue de marquer votre sympathie, non pas à ce que j'ai réalisé, mais à ce que j'ai tenté. Sans doute, encore et surtout, il vous a plu d'adresser un geste amical à la classe ouvrière d'où je sors, et qui n'a, le plus souvent, entendu de paroles flatteuses que de la bouche de ceux qui voulaient obtenir d'elle le droit de la gouverner."

With this play M. Brieux returns to his friend Antoine, who had performed nothing of his since *Blanchette*, which had reached in the January of this year (1898) its hundredth performance by Antoine. The chief part in *Résultat des Courses*—Arsène Chantaud, le père la Joie, was played with remarkable success by Antoine himself.

Chantaud is a bronze-worker in the *atelier* of Lesterel. One day he enters exuberant with joy ; he has just won heavily at the races, stands drinks all round, and makes a present of a silver watch and a gold

¹ Adolphe Brisson, *Les Prophètes*, p. 341. Flammarion et Tallandier.

chain to his son Victor, who is the best workman in the place, highly favoured by his employer, Lesterel, and in love with Lucie Lesterel. After his first piece of luck Chantaud gets the gambling fever; finally he uses a large sum of money—twelve hundred francs—which he had been sent to collect for M. Lesterel, and of course loses that. His employer does not prosecute him, but makes him sign a declaration of theft and dismisses him. Meanwhile the Chantaud family gets poorer and poorer, all the father's pay being lost at the races. The women slave and Victor is the dutiful son—but they are turned out of their home. Chantaud cannot get any employment because the necessary reference to his last employer would bring out the truth. He drifts from bad to worse, and is at last arrested as a loiterer. He appears before the *Commissaire* with a crowd of other wretches, the greater part of whom ask to be sent to gaol as a favour. Happily, Victor has worked hard and become the partner of Lesterel, and reconstructs the home, into which the demoralised father has to be lured.

LE BERCEAU. Comedy in three acts. First played at the *Comédie Française*, December 19th, 1898. Played six times in 1898 and fifteen times in 1899.

Laurence, under pressure from her parents, has divorced her husband, Raymond Chantrel, for infidelity. She has married, again under pressure from her parents, the correct Monsieur de Girieu. There is one child of the first union, le petit Julien, of whom the mother has custody, and whom the correct M. Girieu hates with the hatred only a correct man is capable of feeling. The little boy, while at the house of his grandparents, falls

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seriously ill, so ill that he cannot be taken home under the roof of M. Girieu. The boy's father, Raymond Chantrel, hearing of the illness, hurries to him, insists on seeing him and on staying at his bedside until he is out of danger. Girieu protests violently, but in vain.

The situation, so full of dramatic possibilities, is brought about by the most natural means. Laurence and Raymond are once more brought into close contact with one another, the natural bond between them is to test the force of the artificial power that has separated them. Three nights of the greatest anxiety are passed in silence, no words save such as have immediate bearing on the illness of the child pass between them, every effort is made to respect their artificial separation, but, at last, the force of the natural bond is too great and they fall into each other's arms. In spite of everything they love each other and are united in their child.

M. Girieu refuses to allow the boy to come under his roof again after his recovery, which means that Laurence stays away too; she cannot be separated from her child, she refuses to live with her second husband and takes leave of her first because she and Raymond are too high-minded to rebuild their happiness at the expense of another's—they owe that at least to Girieu. "*Laissez-moi seule ici avec mon père et ma mère, et toute à mon enfant.*"

The play is an attack on divorce where there are children. The parents must be sacrificed to the family; no code can make legitimate the breaking of the natural family bond. If there are no children we may divorce, remarry, or do what we like, but the family is sacred.

“ La loi avait pu nous déclarer désunis, nous pouvions nous être intérieurement juré l'indifférence et l'oubli ; des avoués, des juges, tout le code civil et toutes les lois de la terre avaient pu proclamer que nous étions deux étrangers ; il restait l'enfant. Et la nature qui ne s'intéresse qu'à l'enfant, la nature qui veut que le père et la mère restent unis pour assurer l'existence de l'enfant pour perpétuer la vie, la nature a repris d'assaut les droits qu'on avait voulu lui enlever, et elle a réuni le père et la mère dans une irrésistible étreinte . . . ”
etc. etc.

The idea of the sanctity of the family haunts M. Brioux. The first complete expression of it is in this play, but it is always at the back of his brain. The centre of the family is the child, fraught with all the possibilities of the future. The *droit au bonheur*, the social ambition of parents, is an abomination in so far as it interferes with the life of the family. The institution of the *dot* and paternal authority falsify the family life before it begins. Away with them ! *Le Berceau* helps to make clear the point of view from which *Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont* was written. The attack on the code is worth noting also. Already, in *Le Bureau des Divorces*, he had made fun of the divorce law as soon as it came into force ; now he returns to criticism of the code. In this way *Le Berceau* heralds *La Robe Rouge*, which, not satisfied with criticising one particular article of the code, attacks the institution of Justice itself. *Le Berceau* is not a bad play. It is full of sound ideas and appeals especially to sensibly sentimental mothers who have not too fastidious a taste in literary style. It has some very good scenes and the first act is an excellent piece of work. The characters belong to a world of which M. Brioux knows nothing, and he has not been

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able to imagine their intimate feelings. It would be as ungracious to exact from M. Brieux the subtle skill of a Donnay in handling emotion, as to exact from M. Donnay the conviction and power of a Brieux. It is excusable to situate the subject in such a *milieu*, the poor people whom M. Brieux knows best cannot afford to indulge in the luxury of divorce.

Chapter IV

La Robe Rouge

LA ROBE ROUGE. Play in four acts. Played for the first time at the *Théâtre du Vaudeville*, March 15th, 1900. Revived at the *Théâtre Français*, September 23rd, 1909. Played sixty-four times at the *Vaudeville* and twenty-one times at the *Français* in 1909. Withdrawn by M. Brioux from the repertory of the *Théâtre Français* in July, 1911, after the departure from that theatre of the actor M. Huguenet.

The scene of the play is at Mauléon (Basses Pyrénées) in the country of the Basques. Act I is at the house of Vagret, the Procureur de la République. A crime has been committed at Irrisary—le père Goyetche, an old man of eighty-seven, has been robbed and killed. The murderer remains undiscovered and the newspapers of the district—even the Basque newspaper—take occasion to rail at the slowness of Justice and even to attack the Procureur de la République, Monsieur Vagret.

Madame Vagret is in great grief. For years she has waited for the promotion of her husband to the rank of *conseiller*. Years ago she bought him his robe—the *robe rouge* of a *conseiller*—but has had to keep it in the wardrobe reeking of naphthalene to keep the moth out. And now his promotion is imminent. If only he could obtain a *beau crime* and a reputation-making conviction his appointment would be certain. The *beau crime* has

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been given to them, but—the conviction? there is the difficulty, for the culprit cannot be found. The *juge d'instruction*, Délorme, gives up the case in despair, the Président des Assises begs to be excused from the end-of-session dinner given by Mme. Vagret, as the guests assemble the future looks black indeed for the Vagrets.

But things brighten. M. le Juge Mouzon (the part played by Huguenet) is willing to accept the *dossier* of the *crime d'Irissary* which his colleague, Délorme, has returned to the public prosecutor, Vagret. Mouzon has a brilliant idea; he differs entirely from Délorme, who, according to him, is on the wrong track in assuming that the murderer was a vagabond. Mouzon is convinced that the murderer is a local man, a man who had something to gain by the crime.

Vagret. C'est très juste——

Bunerat. Moi, je dis que c'est admirable de logique et de clarté——

Mouzon. Croyez-moi. L'affaire est simple. Si j'étais chargé de l'instruction, je garantis qu'avant trois jours le coupable serait sous clefs.

Vagret. Eh bien! mon cher collègue, je vais vous apprendre une nouvelle. M. Délorme, très souffrant, m'a rendu le dossier cet après-midi, et il vous revient. C'est vous qui dorénavant êtes chargé de l'instruction du crime d'Irissary.

Mouzon. Je n'ai pas à vous dire que j'accepte, mon cher procureur. Mon devoir est d'obéir. Je ne retire rien de ce que j'ai dit: dans trois jours l'assassin sera arrêté.

Bunerat. Bravo!

Vagret. Je vous remercie de cette promesse au nom de tous—Je vous déclare que vous venez de nous tirer

d'une grosse inquiétude. (*A sa femme*) Ecoute, ma chère amie—M. Mouzon se charge de l'instruction et il nous promet un résultat avant trois jours.

Mme. Vagret. Merci, Monsieur Mouzon—

Mme. Bunerat. Merci.

Vagret. Bertha! Dis qu'on nous serve. Et qu'on monte du vieux vin d'Irrouléguy! Je veux boire à notre succès, mon cher ami—

Le Domestique. Madame est servie.

And, as the curtain descends, everything is well from the professional point of view, and the holders of this point of view, full of the zest of life, are conscious of being perfectly charming human beings.

Mouzon keeps his word, he finds a culprit—Etchepare. The murderer of le père Goyetche can be none other than he, a peasant, who owed the murdered man a considerable sum, and, of course, took the easiest way of getting rid of the debt. Mouzon is a terrible man, his diabolical ingenuity, his pitiless obstinacy in holding to his logical theory (as if he were dealing with mathematical symbols and were trying to prove his point) show him to be utterly unfit to administer justice to human beings. He is not a man, he is a dehumanised specialist.

The second act takes place in his room—*le cabinet de Mouzon, juge d'instruction*. Mouzon has been on the spree at Bordeaux the night before and has a "head," but he is a keen stamp collector and can be prevented by no headache from sticking some newly arrived stamps in his album as he waits until it is time for the *instruction* to begin.

Mondoubleau, the deputy, a Gascon, turns in to see about the case of a friend of his, Labastide, one of

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his best electioneering agents. The deputy is a man to be cultivated ; Mouzon flatters him, makes light of the newspaper attack upon himself.

Mouzon. Que voulez-vous, monsieur le député ! Ce journal est votre ennemi, et, comme je ne me gêne pas pour soutenir ouvertement votre candidature, on fait payer au magistrat les opinions du citoyen——

Mondoubleau. Je suis confus—et je vous remercie, mon cher ami, de tout mon cœur—Continuez—Mais, n'est-ce-pas—soyez prudent—Le garde des sceaux me disait encore avant-hier : “ Je compte sur toi pour m'éviter tout embarras dans ta circonscription—Pas d'affaires ! surtout pas d'affaires ! ” Il faut vous dire qu'Eugène est très attaqué en ce moment——

Mouzon. Vous êtes, avec M. le garde des sceaux, dans des termes d'une intimité aussi——

Mondoubleau (après un geste. Simplement). Nous avons été de la Commune ensemble.

Decidedly this is a man to be cultivated. As a deputy he was worth much to such a ferocious *arriviste* as Mouzon, but as an intimate friend of the minister of justice, a man who calls him Eugène, who thees and thous him—why—he is beyond price, he may have anything he wants without even asking. Labastide need not worry, there is no case against him.

Mouzon. Au revoir. (*Le député sort—Seul.*) Je crois que notre député ne va pas avoir trop mauvaise opinion de moi——

And what is a man accused of murder to a Mouzon ?

“ Le fait est que j'ai eu du flair en soupçonnant Etchepare—Maintenant, il s'agit de lui faire tout avouer, le plus tôt possible——”

And he sets to work in a hustle.

Mouzon (*Assis, donnant un dossier au greffier*). Préparez moi pour ce Labastide une ordonnance de non-lieu et l'ordre de mise en liberté immédiate—Vous ferez ça pendant les interrogatoires—Allons, commençons ! Il est déjà deux heures et nous n'avons encore rien fait—Dépêchez-vous—voyons—Qu'est-ce que vous attendez ? Donnez-moi la liste des témoins—Vous ne comprenez pas ?—Qu'est-ce que vous avez donc, aujourd'hui ?

A witness for the defence, Bridet, is summoned, brow-beaten, sent about his business in short order. And now it is the turn of Etchepare. Maître Placat, the *avocat* in charge of the defence, without whose presence the *juge d'instruction* may not question the accused, steps in.¹

Act II, Scene 6. Mouzon. Bonjour, cher ami—vous allez bien ?

Placat. Très bien—Vous aussi, cher ami ?—Je vous ai entrevu hier soir au Grand-Théâtre, vous étiez avec une bien jolie personne—

Mouzon. Oui, en effet—je—

Placat. Je vous demande pardon—Dites-moi, je

¹ In the original version Maître Placat does not even put in an appearance.

Mouzon. Mentionnons que M. Placat dûment appelé par notre lettre recommandée . . . ne s'est pas présenté et n'a fait connaître les motifs de son absence.

Etchepare. Mon avocat n'est pas là ?

Mouzon. Votre avocat a été convoqué. Il n'est pas venu. C'est qu'il a d'autres clients.

Etchepare. Parce que je ne puis pas le payer assez cher.

Mouzon. Cela ne me regarde pas. Il est convoqué. . . . Il est absent. Je passe outre.

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voulais vous dire un mot à propos de l'affaire Etchepare—

Mouzon. Si vous êtes libre en ce moment, nous allons procéder tout de suite à l'interrogatoire.

Placat. C'est que voilà—je n'ai pas une minute—

Mouzon. Voulez-vous que nous remettons à demain ?

Placat. Non. Je viens de causer avec l'inculpé—C'est sans intérêt, cette histoire-la—Il nie—il nie—et c'est tout. Il accepte d'être interrogé sans moi (*riant*). Je ne vous cacherai pas d'ailleurs, mon cher ami, que je lui ai recommandé de persister dans son système—allons, au revoir—S'il demande un avocat, dans la suite, faites-le moi savoir, je vous enverrai un de mes secrétaires—

Mouzon. Entendu—A bientôt—A bientôt—

And the counsel for the defence (who ought, according to law, to be present at the *interrogatoire*) leaves Etchepare to the mercy of the bustling *juge d'instruction*.

The absence of Placat has been very much criticised; this point will be taken up later.

Then follows Scene 7—the scene of the *interrogatoire*. It should be given entire to be appreciated, but it is too long to quote. It is a great scene. Mouzon plays with Etchepare as a cat with a mouse—working on his feelings, twisting him this way and that, turning on him with a quick thrust, appealing to him persuasively like a father, taking every possible advantage of his own skill and the peasant's helplessness to entrap him into confessing the crime.

In spite of all the lies and admissions of Etchepare, in spite of all the circumstantial evidence, in spite of all the logical force on the side of Mouzon, we have the feeling—a deep conviction—that Etchepare is innocent.

This is the best thing in all the dramatic work of M. Brieux.

Then follows the *interrogatoire* of the wife of the accused, Yanetta (Act II, Scene 9), a scene almost worthy to rank with the one just described. Yanetta has a history—a history recorded in her *casier judiciaire*, unknown to her husband or anyone in her life, almost forgotten by herself. Ten years before, when she was a young servant girl, Yanetta was seduced by the son of the house, who stole money from his father to run away. They were caught ; the son was let off ; Yanetta was imprisoned for a month. Mouzon makes use of this document to force Yanetta to incriminate Etchepare, but all she says only confirms our feelings that he is innocent. Mouzon puts all the evidence of his guilt before Yanetta and almost succeeds in making her believe that he is guilty. Then he sends for the accused ; husband and wife are confronted. This scene is full of outbursts. As the man and woman fight against Mouzon the emotion rises to a high pitch. Yanetta refuses to sign her *interrogatoire* and is arrested.

Yanetta. Tout ce qu'il y a là est faux ! Je vous dis que c'est faux. (*Criant*) La nuit où le père Goyetche a été assassiné, mon mari n'est pas sorti de la maison—Mon mari n'est pas sorti de la maison.

Mouzon (pâle de colère). Vous allez me payer cela—Femme Etchepare, je vous mets en état d'arrestation sous l'inculpation de complicité d'assassinat—(*Aux gendarmes*) Emmenez celui-là dans la chambre de sûreté et revenez chercher celle-ci.

Yanetta. Ah ! vous êtes furieux, hein ? de ne pas être arrivé à votre but !—Oh, vous avez tout fait, tout ce qui était possible, pourtant, à moins de nous brûler à petit feu !—Vous avez fait semblant

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d'être bon—vous parliez avec douceur ! Vous vouliez me faire envoyer mon mari à l'échafaud. C'est votre métier de fournir des têtes à couper—Il vous faut des coupables, il vous en faut à tout prix. Quand un homme est tombé entre vos griffes, c'est un homme perdu—On entre ici innocent, il faut qu'on sorte criminel. C'est votre gloriole d'y arriver ! Vous posez des questions qui n'ont l'air de rien et qui peuvent envoyer un homme dans l'autre monde, et quand vous avez forcé le malheureux à se condamner lui-même, vous en éprouvez une joie de sauvage——

Mouzon. Emmenez-la—dépêchons-nous——

Yanetta. Oui, de sauvage. Ça, de la justice ! C'est ça que vous appelez la justice—Vous êtes un bourreau—Vous êtes aussi féroce que ceux de dans le temps, qui vous broyaient les os pour vous faire avouer !—Vous ne vous en doutez même pas et vous croyez un brave homme, je suis sûre, et vous êtes un bourreau——

Mouzon. Mais emmenez-la donc ! Comment, à vous deux vous ne pouvez pas me débarrasser de cette folle ?

Yanetta. Bourreau ! — Lâche ! — Judas ! — Sans pitié ! Oui, sans pitié—et plus faux et plus cruel quand vous avez affaire à des pauvres gens comme nous ! Oui, plus on est pauvre, plus vous êtes mauvais !—Plus on est pauvre, plus vous êtes——

And at last, after having clung to furniture and doors with a tenacity that defies the strength of the two gendarmes, she is carried away and the curtain falls on this outburst of rhetoric. Reading it, one is, perhaps, too conscious of the rhetoric, too conscious of the trumpet voice of the author behind Yanetta challenging the Institution of Justice. But on the stage it is effective, stirring, rousing the audience to the wildest enthusiasm. The second act of *La Robe Rouge* is M. Brieux at his best.

Act III is in the *cabinet du Procureur de la République*, off the court room, where the case is being tried. Maître Dubois, counsel for the defence, pleads so eloquently that he is applauded by the public and the acquittal of Etchepare seems certain. While the court is still sitting it becomes known that the Procureur-Général has arrived at Mauléon, obviously bringing somebody's appointment to the post of *conseiller*. Who is the lucky man? Is it Vagret? Is it Mouzon? Mouzon is sent for, the Procureur-Général wishes to have a private interview with him. Mouzon is in great glee. The Procureur comes to the point at once, demands his resignation from the magistracy. The spree at Bordeaux has resulted in an open scandal. Mouzon refuses to resign, he is not afraid of the scandal, let the Procureur do what he likes. The deputy, Mondoubleau, intervenes to save the situation; the papers are about to attack Mouzon and demand his removal, and the Minister of Justice, "Eugène," does not want any disturbance.

Le Procureur-Général. Malheureusement, Coire est au courant et menace de tout raconter dans son journal, à moins que M. Mouzon soit éloigné de Mauléon——

Mondoubleau. Diable! (*Il se met à rire.*)

Le Procureur-Général. Qu'est-ce qui vous fait rire?—

Mondoubleau. Rien—une idée baroque—une plaisanterie—(*il rit*). Dites donc—mais n'allez pas vous fâcher, hein?—c'est une plaisanterie——

Le Procureur-Général. Dites——

Mondoubleau. Je pensais—Je vous dis, une idée baroque—En somme—En somme, si vous proposiez Mouzon pour le siège de conseiller à Pau, vous feriez plaisir à tout le monde——

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Le Procureur-Général. Mon cher député——

Mondoubleau. Puisque c'est pour rire, une simple plaisanterie—Seulement, ce qu'il y avait d'amusant dans ce que je vous disais, c'est que vous donneriez à la fois satisfaction à Coire, à moi, à Mouzon et à Eugène, qui ne veut pas de scandale——

Le Procureur-Général. Mais c'en serait un——

Mondoubleau. Erreur. En politique, il n'y a de scandale que lorsqu'il y a publicité——

Le Procureur-Général. Mais enfin——

Mondoubleau. Je suis de votre avis. Je sais bien tout ce que l'on peut dire—Je vous le répète, je dis cela pour badiner—Et savez-vous ce qui est curieux, vraiment—quand on réfléchit?—C'est que cette solution fantaisiste est la seule qui n'ait pas de sérieux inconvénients—apparents—Mais oui—Si vous laissez Mouzon ici, Coire raconte tout—— . . .

And the Procureur-Général, who has his eye on a better post in the Orleans circuit, gives Mouzon the appointment at Pau.

Meanwhile the trial of Etchepare has been going on. Vagret has replied to Dubois, upset all his arguments, made the condemnation wellnigh inevitable, and is on the point of asking for judgment, when he suddenly becomes strangely moved, pulls himself up and asks that the sitting be suspended. Into the heart of the man creeps a doubt as to the guilt of the accused.—While the professional mind was performing its functions at its best, a human sentiment is aroused and upsets everything. Before making known this doubt to the court Vagret wishes to consult with the President of the Assizes and the Procureur-Général. What is his duty? They will have nothing to do with his human scruples, they resent his attempts to make them re-

sponsible for his professional incapacity, and they leave him to his doubts and—his wife.

Mme. Vagret. Qu'est-ce qu'il y a ?

Vagret. Rien.

Mme. Vagret. Rien ? Tu es tout sombre, et, cependant, tu viens d'avoir un succès qui comptera dans ta carrière.

Vagret. C'est ce succès-là qui m'effraie.

Mme. Vagret. Qui t'effraie ?

Vagret. Oui, j'ai peur.

Mme. Vagret. Peur de quoi ?

Vagret. D'avoir été trop loin.

Mme. Vagret. Trop loin !—Est-ce qu'il ne mérite pas dix fois la mort, cet assassin ?

Vagret (après un silence). Tu es bien certaine, toi, qu'il est un assassin ?

Mme. Vagret. Oui.

Vagret (à voix basse). Eh bien—moi——

Mme. Vagret. Toi ?

Vagret. Moi, je n'en sais plus rien.

Mme. Vagret. Mon Dieu !

Vagret. Oui, il s'est produit en moi, au cours de mon réquisitoire, une chose effrayante—Pendant que moi, ministère public, moi, accusateur officiel, j'exerçais ma fonction, un autre moi-même examinait la cause avec sang-froid ; une voix intérieure me reprochait ma violence et me glissait dans l'esprit un doute qui a grandi—Il s'est livré dans mon âme une lutte douloureuse, et grave, et cruelle—et si j'ai eu, en terminant, cette émotion dont parlait le président, si j'ai demandé la peine avec cette voix éteinte, c'est que j'étais à bout de forces, c'est que dans ce combat, ma conscience était sur le point de l'emporter et je me suis hâté de

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terminer, parce que j'avais peur que sa voix n'éclatât malgré moi—Lorsque j'ai vu que l'avocat restait assis et ne prenait pas la parole pour dire les choses que j'aurais voulu qu'il dît au jury—alors, j'ai vraiment eu peur de moi-même, peur de mes actes, de mes paroles, de leurs épouvantables conséquences, et j'ai voulu gagner du temps.

The struggle between the man and the magistrate in Vagret continues to the end of the act, until he finally decides to perform his "*devoir d'honnête homme*." He informs the jury of his doubts as to the guilt of Etchepare and the man is acquitted. Justice has been done—but the man's life is ruined. Evil enough befell him while under arrest—his house had been wrecked, his mother and his children turned out ; but this was as nothing compared to what he learnt in open court of his wife's early history.

Act IV takes place in the *cabinet* of Mouzon (the scene of the second act). Etchepare, on his release, is to leave for America with his mother and his children. Yanetta is to be left behind—she shall never see them again.

Yanetta. Pardon !

Etchepare. Jamais ! Jamais !

Yanetta. Ne prononce pas ce mot là—il n'y a que Dieu qui ait le droit de dire : jamais. Je rentrerai dans ta maison ; j'y serai seulement la première des servantes—la plus humble, si tu veux !—je ne prendrai ma place au foyer que lorsque tu me le diras.—

Etchepare. Nous n'avons plus de maison. Nous n'avons plus de foyer.—Nous n'avons plus rien ! Et je te répète que c'est ta faute—et que c'est parce que tu t'es assise, à la place de la mère, de ma mère, toi la menteuse et la sacrilège, que la malheur est tombé sur nous !

Yanetta. Cela, je te le jure, je t'amènerai à l'oublier à force d'humilité, de dévouement et de repentir.—Et n'importe où tu iras, je te suivrai.—Pierre, réfléchis, tes enfants ont encore besoin de moi.—

Etchepare. Mes enfants ! Je ne veux plus que tu les voies, je ne veux plus que tu leur parles, je ne veux plus que tu les embrasses, je ne veux plus que tu les touches.

Yanetta (changeant de ton). Ah ! Ah ! ça ! ah ! non ! —Ça, les enfants ! ça, tu te trompes ! Ah ! ah ! non ! Que tu me prives de tout, que tu me condamnes à toutes les hontes—que tu me forces à mendier mon pain, je veux bien ! Que tu ne me regardes pas, que tu ne me parles que pour m'injurier—tout, tout ce que tu veux.—Mais, mes enfants !—mes enfants, ça, c'est à moi—ils sont sortis de mon ventre, ils font encore partie de moi —et toujours, toujours, ils seront pétris avec ma chair et avec mon sang.

Left thus, without a home, without her husband, without her children, Yanetta has a big account to settle with Mouzon, who comes to set her provisionally at liberty and, perhaps, to withdraw his complaint against her entirely, if she will apologise for her abusive language. Yanetta regrets nothing—it is she who has an account to be settled.

Yanetta. Ecoutez-moi—pour la dernière fois, je vous demande ce que vous allez imaginer pour me soulager, pour me rendre tout ce que j'ai perdu par votre faute ; ce que vous allez faire pour diminuer mes chagrins et comment vous allez vous y prendre pour me rendre mes enfants.

Mouzon. Je n'ai rien à vous dire. Je ne vous dois rien.

Yanetta. Vous ne me devez rien ! Vous me devez plus que ma vie, plus que tout.—Mes enfants, je ne les reverrai jamais.—Ce que vous m'avez pris, c'est le

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bonheur de toutes les minutes, c'est leurs baisers de tous les soirs, c'est la fierté que j'avais à les regarder grandir.—Jamais ! jamais plus je ne les entendrai dire "maman !" c'est comme s'ils étaient morts ! c'est comme si vous me les aviez tués. (*Elle saisit le couteau.*) Oui ! Voilà votre œuvre, à vous, les mauvais juges : d'un innocent vous avez failli faire un forçat, et d'une honnête femme, d'une mère, vous faites une criminelle ! (*Elle le frappe. Il tombe.*)

This last act has been severely criticised. M. Faguet is particularly fastidious ; to him it is an unworthy melodrama tacked on to a fine strong comedy ; for him the play ends with the third act. The truth is there is no fault to find with the unity of interest. M. Gustave Larroumet is nearer the mark when he says :

" En lui-même ce dénouement est largement motivé, et M. Brieux n'a fait que suivre jusqu'au bout la logique de son sujet."¹

The fault is in the style.

" Si l'acte traîne c'est qu'il est faiblement écrit, sans concision et sans relief. Yanetta parle beaucoup ; elle ne dit que des choses justes, mais elle les dit trop longuement et de manière peu frappante. J'espère que cette infériorité finale ne nuira pas au succès d'une pièce dont les trois quarts sont de premier ordre."¹

The hope of M. Larroumet has been amply gratified ; the rhetorical finale is more acceptable to the public than to the man of letters—to-day the man of taste disapproves of rhetoric in the theatre, but the public does not. M. Brieux does not appeal to the man of letters, who is often unable to accept his work in the spirit in which it is meant.

¹ *Le Temps*, Lundi, 19 Mars, 1900.

A more serious issue is raised by the criticism of Scene 6 of Act II quoted on pages 61 and 62.

M. de Saint Aubain accuses M. Brieux of error :

"L'instruction du prétendu crime est poussée de main de maître. L'effet dramatique est puissant. Une seule erreur, erreur grave. Depuis la réforme du code on ne peut tenir huit jours un homme au secret sans l'interroger, et l'avocat assiste à l'interrogatoire ; une migraine du défenseur (*sic*) ne suffit point à esquiver le texte ; la cour suprême casserait l'œuvre infidèle de Mouzon."¹

One has only to read the scene in question to feel sure that M. Brieux knows all this perfectly well.

M. Larroumet attacks from a different angle :

"Malheureusement cette belle scène est achetée par une grosse invraisemblance. Depuis une loi récente, l'accusé n'est plus seul devant un juge d'instruction. Un avocat l'assiste et rend moins inégal la lutte entre le prévenu et le magistrat. M. Brieux, pour ne pas se priver du bénéfice d'une situation scénique, a supposé que l'avocat était absent par hasard.—Explication bien faible. L'affaire Etchepare passionne l'opinion. Surtout en province, où de telles aubaines sont rares, un avocat ne lâchera pas son client."²

The charge is a grave one ; it makes the play depend on a subtle device and weakens the attack against justice from beginning to end. One might urge as an excuse that M. Brieux had been at work on the play for a long time, that the *loi récente* was passed after the play had taken shape, that the scene of the *instruction* was too essential a part of the play to be sacrificed, and that M. Brieux makes use of an expedient to get the advocate

¹ *La Quinzaine*, 1 Avril, 1900.

² *Le Temps*, Lundi, 19 Mars, 1900.

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out of the way. The excuse will not hold; firstly, because M. Brieux is too honest; secondly, because the law was voted December 8th, 1897, and came into force December 10th—too long before the production of the play (March, 1900) for this argument to be valid.

The explanation is, perhaps, much simpler. The law exists, but like so many other laws, it is not obeyed. The casual indifference of Maître Placat to his duty is just one more thrust at the professional man of law. As an explanation it would be *bien faible*, as a satirical touch it is not only quite acceptable, but it helps the general effect of the play. For the matter of that Etchepare is willing to be questioned alone.¹

La Robe Rouge is called neither comedy nor tragedy, it is called a play—a meaningless term which gives no clue to the author's intention. Monsieur Faguet regards it as a comedy, a strong satirical comedy. It is so regarded by many others. The story of the conception of the play will serve to throw light on this point, as well as to show the way M. Brieux works.

As a journalist he frequented the law courts in Paris. He was struck by the helplessness of the uneducated poor people before all the complicated processes of Justice, and the callous indifference of the specialist who understood the technique of the business and was so absorbed in it as to become dehumanised. The play, says M. Brieux, might well bear, for second title, *La Déformation Professionnelle*. The execution of Justice is further

¹ "Placat. Il accepte d'être interrogé sans moi."

Article 9 of the law in question reads: "L'inculpé détenu ou libre ne peut être interrogé ou confronté, à moins qu'il n'y renonce expressément, qu'en présence de son conseil ou lui dûment appelé." (Vide *Recueils des Lois Décrets Circulaires*, etc., 5 Février, 1911, p. 42. Paris, Muzard et Ebin.)

complicated by the *question d'argent*, which lies behind all our social crimes. Even the honest Vagret is forced out of his normal line of conduct, while Mouzon, though not open to corruption, is an *arriviste* of the first order. M. Brioux is moved to pity at the helplessness of the poor, but to make the struggle keener and the cruelty more impressive he needs a better antagonist than the degraded pauper of Paris. He must have an uneducated man—not a demoralised man—a peasant, a peasant full of native pride. “J’avais besoin d’un homme frustré—un paysan—digne, sans bassesse malgré son manque de culture—j’ai choisi le basque.” So down he goes to the Basses Pyrénées, mixes with the people, learns a bit of their language, and finally situates his play. He was already conversant with the thousand and one details of judicial procedure. It remained for him to pit the peasant against the professional. The tone of the play is essentially serious, the last act is an important part of the original intention of the author ; the amusing bits of irony are added, they do not interfere with the grimness of the struggle, rather do they heighten the effect of it ; the moral of the struggle is that the specialist must obey human laws—that there are general considerations of higher import than his special considerations. It is the specialist who is killed by a human being at bay. This is different from the *Justice* of Mr. Galsworthy, which is called a tragedy, and where the hero is the victim of a grim monster which no one can control. “The chariot wheels of Justice” do not come into play in *La Robe Rouge*. An appeal is made to the higher understanding of magistrates, to their deepest human feelings, to get rid of the *pli professionnel*.

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" On se rappelle au Palais de Justice avoir vu l'année dernière l'auteur de *La Robe Rouge* promener dans les Pas Perdus sa flânerie observatrice. Un Palais doit se méfier des visites d'un écrivain. M. Brieux arpentait les couloirs, poussait la porte des salles d'audiences, approchait de la barre, se mettait dans l'œil le décor judiciaire, causait avec les avocats, disait bonjour aux procureurs, dévisageait, un sourire attentif aux lèvres, Mme. Thémis assise, debout, dans toutes les attitudes et toutes les poses commandées par les diversités redoutables de sa fonction. Il sortait un crayon, un papier et notait. Des notes—c'était à prévoir—naquit une pièce dont le dialogue—c'était à prévoir encore—est moins aimable que les conversations d'antan. Les grâces du visiteur font place aux amertumes de l'auteur. Car l'auteur est un amer et le spectacle de la vie émeut sa bile généreuse ; son ironie n'est pas de celles qui caressent : elle mord : et toujours dans sa verve on sent frémir une colère ; il ne s'amuse pas des choses, il en frissonne." ¹

Monsieur de Saint Aubain has not penetrated to the depths of the author's intention, but his opinion is worth having. Here is another passage from the same article :—

" Que de détails frappants, de cruelles analyses. Ce témoin a décharge qui, écouté, rétablirait d'un mot les choses, et qu'on abrutit, déconcerté, parce qu'au lieu d'un sauveur on ne voit en lui qu'un gêneur ; cet innocent qui plaide le faux pour se tirer des griffes, et par ses gaucheries crée de menteuses vraisemblances—cette femme qu'on tient par son casier judiciaire effraient le philosophe. J'approuve de telles visions à ceux de qui dépendent notre honneur et nos intérêts—on ne rappelle jamais trop les gravités de leur tâche ; il faudrait que toujours, en revêtant sa robe, celui qui instruit, qui requiert, ou qui juge, eût présente à la mémoire la phrase de Lamennais, " Quand je pense qu'il y a des hommes qui osent juger des hommes je suis épouvanté et un grand frisson me prend." " ¹

¹ *La Quinzaine*, 1 Avril, 1900.

Chapter V

Plays from 1901-1909

LES REMPLAÇANTES. Play in three acts. First produced at the *Théâtre Antoine*, February 15th, 1901. Played 116 times in 1901, ten times in 1902, five times in 1903, sixteen times in 1904.

The first act takes place at a small village from which Paris draws its supply of wet-nurses. For generations the mothers—*filles-mères* and married women—have been lured away to perform that office which the fashionable *Parisienne* has too little leisure and too much vanity to perform. The result of such a system is bad for the *Parisienne*, demoralising to the peasant, and often disastrous to the child.

The system is attacked from all three points of view, but especially from that of the peasant. The central figure of the play is Lazarette Planchot, a natural, good-hearted woman, who has no inclination to leave her baby or her husband. But the neighbours jeer at her for a fool, her father-in-law insists, and even her husband, greedy for gain like the average peasant, urges her. She is finally persuaded to accept a place in a wealthy family. The first act is full of those significant details of humble life which M. Brieux knows so well and renders so truly.

The second act takes place in the house of the Denisart. Lazarette is in very good hands, well cared for, not to say

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spoilt. Nothing must happen to the nurse lest *le petit Guy* should suffer in the end. Having thus transferred her natural office to a *remplaçante*, the elegant Madame Denisart is able to return to the mundanities of her *salon*, to retain the affections of her husband, and even to find time to caress her offspring. A very satisfactory arrangement. But what about the child, the husband, and the home of Lazarette? The Denisart household is suddenly upset by the arrival of a telegram for Lazarette—" *le petit n'est pas bien.*" A dilemma!—What is to be done?—withhold the telegram—it is the simplest solution; besides, it is the "day" of Madame Denisart, nothing must be allowed to interfere with her "receiving." Visitors arrive, conversation ensues, fatuous, stupid, until Doctor Richon, a *médecin de campagne*, replying to the questions of the ladies, expounds the thesis of the author:—

Richon. . . . Si, pouvant allaiter, vous ne l'avez point voulu, vous avez causé beaucoup de mal. A vous-mêmes, d'abord . . . en vous exposant à toutes les maladies qui sont la conséquence possible de votre abstention. . . . Vous faites sucer à votre enfant le lait d'une femme . . . dans le verre de laquelle vous n'aurez pas voulu boire. . . . Si vous saviez qu'en donnant votre enfant à une nourrice vous augmentez les chances de le voir mourir vous le garderiez. . . .

Madame Denisart. Nous avons peur, en allaitant nos enfants de perdre nos maris.

Richon. Soit. Vous avez peur pour votre foyer et vous prenez une nourrice. Mais elle est mariée, cette nourrice. Mais son mari sera exposé à ces mêmes tentations que vous redoutez pour le vôtre. Donc, afin de vous épargner un danger, vous exposez une autre femme à un danger identique. Je sais bien que c'est une paysanne. Mais avez-vous le droit de juger, vous,

que votre bonheur mérite d'être payé au prix du sien ? Avez-vous le droit de juger que la vie de votre enfant vaut le sacrifice possible de la vie de son enfant ? . . . Vous avez mis au cœur de nos villageoises un tel besoin de gagner de l'argent qu'elles abandonnent leurs petits avec joie. Et elles savent, cependant, que ces petits sont trop souvent des condamnés à mort. . . . Je sais des choses que vous ne savez pas, croyez-moi. Si je suis ardent c'est que depuis quarante ans j'assiste à la démoralisation des paysans—démoralisation causée par la séparation de la femme et du mari—c'est que depuis quarante ans, j'assiste à la mort des pauvres petits innocents qui vivraient si leur mère ne leur avait pas été prise, et qui sont la rançon de vos joies et de vos loisirs. La mortalité des enfants de nourrices sur lieu est effroyable ; trois fois plus forte que la mortalité ordinaire ; . . . Laissez-moi vous dire ce qui se passe. Là-bas, dès qu'une femme vient d'accoucher, elle n'a qu'une préoccupation, être nourrice. Elle veut l'être le plus tôt possible, parce qu'à Paris les nourrices qui ont le lait le plus jeune sont les plus recherchées. La famille, pour mieux se renseigner sur la santé de la nourrice, désire voir son enfant. Alors, cette femme n'hésite pas. Par tous les temps—en plein été, en plein hiver, elle embarque le pauvre petit dans un wagon de troisième classe, et la voilà partie pour Paris, avec son lamentable, son douloureux colis. Elle arrive au bureau de placement, elle attend. Elle attend qu'une de vous ait besoin d'elle. Cela dure quelquefois quinze jours ! Cette femme, au bureau de placement, n'a droit qu'à un lit. Il faut qu'elle se nourrisse elle-même. Elle est pauvre. Imaginez donc quels soins l'enfant peut recevoir. Enfin, elle est engagée. Alors, un meneur, une meneuse, une autre nourrice, une voisine remporte le pauvre petit enfant, par les mêmes chaleurs ou les mêmes froids, dans le même wagon de troisième classe. On le conduit ordinairement chez ses grands-parents, bonnes gens sans doute, mais ignorants, et qui, lorsque l'enfant demande le sein de sa mère, lui enfonce dans

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la bouche le caoutchouc d'un biberon sale. (*Au public*) Alors vous comprenez bien qu'ils meurent, ces pauvres petits ! vous le comprenez bien !—Et vous comprenez bien que j'ai raison de faire appel pour eux à votre esprit de justice et à votre pitié !

Madame Denisart. C'est effroyable !

Madame d'Alèze. Mais il devrait y avoir des lois pour empêcher cela !

Richon. Il y en a une, Madame. Il y a la loi Roussel, loi admirable qui exige que toute femme qui veut se placer comme nourrice ait donné le sein à son enfant pendant sept mois. Eh bien, cette loi, on ne l'applique pas ! Que dis-je ? Ce sont ceux qui sont chargés de la faire respecter qui la combattent. Vous ne le croyez pas ? J'affirme ceci ; le préfet de police a écrit une lettre, une lettre officielle, où il se refuse à appliquer cette loi parce que—ce sont ses paroles textuelles, “parce que cela aurait pour conséquences de jeter une perturbation profonde dans les habitudes de la population parisienne !” . . . Et il faudrait avoir le courage d'aller jusqu'au bout. Il faudrait que l'allaitement maternel fut considéré comme le service militaire des femmes. Avant 1870 un homme riche avait, en France, le droit de se soustraire à l'impôt du sang et de s'acheter un homme, comme on disait alors. Il n'y a plus de remplaçants, il faudrait qu'il n'y ait plus de remplaçantes.

In the third act Lazarette, having learnt the contents of the telegram, filled with anxiety, returns home to find her baby nearly dead after convulsions and her husband spending her earnings at the *cabaret* and carrying on with another woman. She refuses to return to the Denisart, she reclaims her man and settles down to nurse her child back to life.

The rhetoric in this play is more marked than in *La Robe Rouge*. The long quotation from the second

act shows to what extent M. Brieux dares to defy all the theatrical canons, introducing in the person of Richon no mere *porte-parole* or *raisonneur* such as Dumas and Molière were wont to use, but a preacher who preaches a sermon—preaches not only to the characters in the play but to the audience. The stage direction “*au public*”¹ cannot be ignored. M. Brieux is making use of the stage for purposes other than dramatic. The extraordinary thing is, not that he should have done it, but that he should have succeeded in doing it without killing his play. The democratic audience in a theatre likes a certain amount of rhetoric. In the next play, *Les Avariés*, M. Brieux goes even further, ignores the dramatic needs and contents himself with didactic dialogue. The dramatic interest in *Les Remplaçantes* is strong enough to carry the rhetoric. It is the most successful of all the plays of M. Brieux, judged by the standard of the number of performances; it is also the most characteristic, filled with much of his essential virtue and by no means free from his besetting faults.

LES AVARIÉS. Play in three acts. Rehearsed at the *Théâtre Antoine* in November, 1901, but prohibited by the censor. Played at Liège and Brussels in 1902, but not produced in Paris till 1905, when it was put on at the *Théâtre Antoine* on February 23rd. Played fifty-six times in 1905, once in 1906, once in 1907, and twice at the *Odéon* in 1908.

On November 1st, 1901, after the play had been prohibited, M. Brieux read the work to a specially invited audience (consisting largely of officials and doctors): it was received with enthusiasm.

¹ *Vide*, p. 78.

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Before the curtain rose on the first production of the play in Paris in 1905, M. Antoine made the following announcement: "Cette pièce a pour sujet l'étude de la syphilis dans ses rapports avec le mariage. Elle ne contient aucun sujet de scandale, aucun mot obscène. Est-il donc nécessaire que les femmes soient sottes et ignorantes pour être vertueuses ? "

The first act takes place in the consulting-room of a specialist, and consists of one long scene between the doctor and the "*avarié*," who wishes to be cured immediately because he is about to get married. The doctor declares that the marriage must be put off for three or four years, that it would be a crime for him to marry until he is cured—a crime against his wife and children. Naturally he will not commit such a crime. But the second act shows that he has committed the crime from lack of courage to make the explanations necessary for a postponement of the marriage. Married and happy in his home, he is astonished, actually astonished, to find the doctor's predictions come true. The child is tainted and the specialist insists that it be taken from the nurse lest she also be infected. The nurse learns the truth and declares in the presence of the mother that she will not suckle a child that is "*pourri*." The wife, thus acquainted with her husband's secret, is horrified and flies to her father who insists on a separation.

In the third act, which takes place in the *cabinet du docteur dans l'hôpital dont il est le médecin en chef*, the specialist explains to her father that there is no reason for a separation, that he must persuade the wife to return to her husband.

" Vous lui direz qu'une séparation serait un malheur

pour tous, que son mari est le seul qui puisse avoir assez de dévouement pour l'aider à sauver son enfant. Vous lui direz qu'avec ces ruines de son premier bonheur elle peut s'en édifier un autre fort enviable. Vous ajouterez à cela tout ce que votre cœur de brave homme vous inspirera et nous nous arrangerons pour que le prochain enfant du couple réconcilié soit robuste et vigoureux."

An unexpected and optimistic solution. Since the *beau-père* is a deputy, the doctor takes advantage of the opportunity to acquaint him with the facts and to impress upon him the urgent need for the matter of public health to be taken up by the Chamber.

Le Docteur. Ah voilà ! vous ne saviez pas ! Vous êtes père et vous ne saviez pas ! Vous êtes député, vous avez assumé la charge et l'honneur de faire les lois et vous ne savez pas ! Vous ignorez la syphilis, comme probablement vous ignorez l'alcoolisme et la tuberculose ? . . . Mais la syphilis, pourquoi ne vous en occupez-vous pas ? pourquoi donc, un jour, après avoir fait des ministères chargés de défendre toutes sortes de choses, n'en feriez-vous pas un chargé de défendre la santé publique ?

Le Beau-Père. Mon cher docteur, vous tombez dans le travers français qui consiste à considérer le gouvernement comme la cause de tous les maux. Montrez-nous le chemin, messieurs les savants, et puisqu'il s'agit de choses que vous connaissez et que nous ignorons, commencez par nous indiquer les mesures que vous croyez nécessaires—

Le Docteur. Ah ! ah ! elle est bien bonne—Il y aura dix-huit ans bientôt qu'un projet de cette nature, élaboré par l'Académie de Médecine, approuvé par elle à l'unanimité, a été envoyé au ministre compétent. On n'en a jamais entendu reparler.

Le Beau-Père. Croyez-vous donc qu'il y ait véritablement des mesures—

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Le Docteur. Vous allez les indiquer vous-même. . . . Je vais vous donner la preuve que notre plus grande ennemie c'est l'ignorance—Vous allez voir—(*Il va à la porte*). Cela me met hors de moi. Qu'est-ce que vous voulez ! Nous ne pouvons pas aller les chercher, les malades. (*A une femme au dehors*) Entrez, Madame. (*Au beau-père*) Tenez, en voici un exemple—Voilà une femme qui est très sérieusement atteinte—Je le lui ai dit—Je lui ai dit de venir tous les huit jours—(*A la femme*) Est-ce vrai ?

L'Ouvrière. Oui, monsieur.

Le Docteur (colère). Et il y a combien de temps que vous êtes venue ?

L'Ouvrière. Trois mois. . . . etc. etc.

And thus, as in a later play—*Maternité*—we are introduced to a new set of characters, *une ouvrière, un père, une fille* ; the limits of the dramatic frame are ignored, the subject reaches out of the play, unending, stretching out into the world beyond.

Le Docteur. Vous le voyez, monsieur, le vrai remède est dans une modification des mœurs. Il faudrait qu'on cessât de traiter la syphilis comme un mal mystérieux dont on ne doit même prononcer le nom——

The author's aim is expressed in the dedication to Monsieur le Professeur A. Fournier, Membre de l'Académie de Médecine.

“Monsieur, Je vous demande la permission de vous dédier cette pièce. La plupart des idées qu'elle cherche à vulgariser sont les vôtres. Je pense avec vous que la syphilis perdra considérablement de sa gravité lorsqu'on osera parler ouvertement d'un mal qui n'est ni une honte ni un châtiment, et lorsque ceux qui en sont atteints, sachant quels malheurs ils peuvent propager, connaîtront

mieux leurs devoirs envers les autres et envers eux-mêmes."

M. Brieux makes use of the stage to popularise the ideas of a savant, to wage war on an ignorant and lethargic public opinion.

Les Avariés is not a good play. Whether the subject be suitable or not the author has not succeeded in making it dramatic, perhaps because such a theme had to be so carefully handled that it was impossible for him to let himself go. The characters do not live, they speak only from the dictation of a didactic author. In spite of this the play is interesting to an audience and has achieved great notoriety ; it has added a new word to current speech ; it has effaced the author of *Blanchette*, who is now popularly known as the author of *Les Avariés*.

LA PETITE AMIE. Play in three acts. First produced at the *Comédie Française*, May 3rd, 1902, and played twenty-two times.

The first act (and, indeed, the greater part of the play) takes place in the *Magasin de Modes en gros* of M. Logerais, in the *quartier du Temple* ; it depicts to the life the daily existence of the poor working *modiste*. The making and packing of hats, the relations between patron and employées, the discreet attitude of Madame Logerais—in a few rapid telling strokes the world ruled by Logerais is set before us, and the character of its tyrant, cruel, vain, disloyal—and successful. Apart from his business and his pleasure, the one thing that interests him is the marriage of his son André, on whose legal education it has been his pride to spend money.

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It has been his pride to arrange a match for André, a match with Money, which shall justify the expensive education and establish the son of a *commerçant* as a *Monsieur*. The inclinations of André do not fit in with the nicely calculated plans of his lord and father. He has an inclination for one of the girls in the shop—Marguerite, simple and poor, but honest—the only one of the assistants who has not fallen before the fascinations of père Logerais. The struggle that ensues between father and son, between natural inclination and parental tyranny, is the theme of the play. André cannot marry without his father's consent until he is twenty-five years old; he is dependent on his father's bounty—consent and bounty are withheld. Marguerite is dismissed. André does his best to support himself and Marguerite, but fails signally. After a rhetorical outburst against Society by André they throw themselves into the river to end their misery before their child is born.

The play shows to what lengths M. Brieux is willing to go in his enthusiasm for the child. In his hatred of paternal tyranny he accepts all the weakness and extravagance of the boy. It is justifiable to protest vigorously against paternal tyranny and the *dot* because they render natural marriage impossible and pervert the family life from its very beginning, but *La Petite Amie* is a less effective protest than *Les Trois Filles de Monsieur Dupont* with which it has a good deal in common.

MATERNITÉ. Play in three acts. First produced December 9th, 1903, at the *Théâtre Antoine*; played twenty-eight times in 1903, forty-nine times in 1904, three times in 1905.

The play opens in the house of a *Sous-préfet* in the provinces, Julien Brignac. The atmosphere of official provincial life is painted to show how the official political representative compromises to keep up appearances. This may be taken as symbolical of the falsification of political opinions by social hypocrisy. The play gradually concentrates on one particular problem—the problem of population. M. Brioux admits as a truth that quality is to be preferred to quantity, therefore it behoves us to admit that it would be a good thing if population could be controlled; that prolific nature is cruel; that it would be an advance in civilisation if one had only the children one wants. The problem is brought painfully home to the *Sous-préfet*. Annette, the young sister of his wife, is as good as affianced to Jacques Bernin; the marriage is taken for granted. To her horror she hears that his father has arranged another match. Jacques had seduced her, but he is too weak to oppose his father, and Annette is left to her fate. When the *Sous-préfet* hears of her condition he insists on her leaving his house before the secret is out, in order to save his reputation. His wife, Lucie, leaves with her sister. They go to Paris, where Annette escapes from her self-sacrificing sister and goes to a *sage-femme*. The operation proves fatal. In the last act we are introduced to an entirely new set of characters at the trial of the *sage-femme*, Madame Thomas. She is not the only prisoner; *l'institutrice*, Tupin, *ouvrier électricien*, Madame Tupin, all are tried for child murder. The magistrate upholds the law; the evidence in the various cases is all in protest against the law, couched in varying degrees of intensity, until at last the play ends in a chaos of anarchistic outbursts. The finale is

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vague and rhapsodic, not to say uproarious. The effect is obscure, the end is not a conclusion, the problem is not solved.

The truth is that M. Brieux does not know his own mind. He would like to prevent the birth of undesired children, but he is not so pitiless as to plead for the legalisation of abortion. M. Brieux is not an advanced thinker, he cannot be logical at the expense of feeling. In following an advanced idea he has got out of his depth; he is more on his own ground when he reacts from an advanced idea towards a common point of departure. *Maternité* and *Les Avariés* are two out of the three plays selected by Mr. Bernard Shaw to introduce M. Brieux to the English public. *Maternité* is even given in two versions. The second version of *Maternité* is more closely woven. The chief change is in the character of *Brignac*, who is an "alcoolique"—not an habitual drunkard, but sufficiently poisoned for his children to be nervous wrecks. This the specialist makes clear to Madame Brignac. For preventing the birth of another child doomed to a life of suffering Madame Brignac is held as a criminal and comes up for trial in the last act.

LA DÉSERTEUSE. Play in four acts, in collaboration with Jean Sigaux. First produced October 15th, 1904, at the *Odéon*, and played forty-one times.

La Déserteuse may be lightly passed over; it is not especially interesting and it is a variation on the same theme as *Le Berceau*, namely, the cruel position of the child of parents who have separated, a subject taken up again to some extent in *Suzette*. Madame Forjot is

the "*déserteuse*"; she finds her husband a bore and runs off with a musician, leaving her daughter Pascaline behind. Forjot, in order to provide a mother for his daughter, marries her governess, Hélène, who fills the office with more than exemplary devotion. The daughter ungratefully prefers her mother when the "*déserteuse*" returns years later to reclaim her natural place in her daughter's affections. The fight between the two mothers is ended by the intervention of Forjot, who explains that Hélène has carefully trained Pascaline to revere her mother's memory and has hidden the truth. Pascaline returns to the paternal roof.

L'ARMATURE. Play in five acts, after the novel by Paul Hervieu. First produced April 19th, 1905, at the *Vaudeville*, and played nineteen times.

The dramatisation is not so good as the novel. The great scene of the discovery by Exireuil of his wife's infidelity is effective, but the early part of the play is too much taken up with minor characters. Since it is only an adaptation it need not be discussed here.

LES HANNETONS. Comedy in three acts. First produced February 3rd, 1906, at the *Renaissance*, and played thirty-eight times.

Pierre Cotrel, who teaches natural history at a school in Paris, having no taste for the monotony and petty tyrannies of married life, lives with Charlotte, a simple work-girl, twenty years younger than himself. They do not get on very well, in spite of the freedom of their union. Pierre cannot share his life with Charlotte, she has no education. Charlotte is very whimsical, and

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irritating beyond human endurance ; they bicker over this, they squabble over that. To make matters worse Pierre learns that she is not even faithful to him. Brochot, an old school friend of Pierre, turns up and proves irresistible to Charlotte ; he imitates a train so amusingly she can refuse him nothing. Pierre is furious. It is no mere squabble this time. Charlotte replies with a smack, but that does not pacify Pierre so she threatens to leave. Still he does not soften, therefore Charlotte packs her things and has them put on a cab. Pierre remains inexorable. Charlotte departs eager to be recalled, but she has gone too far, she is allowed to leave. Pierre is jubilant, once more he is free to do what he likes ; he has saved two hundred francs, he will go to Brittany, he has long wanted to go to Brittany. But—Charlotte ? Charlotte has written, but her letters have not even been opened ; therefore Charlotte has officially informed all her friends that at a certain hour on a certain day she will put an end to her miserable existence by jumping into the Seine from the Pont Neuf. Pierre is adamant even to that. Owing to some mistake about the appointed day and hour Charlotte was not prevented from jumping into the river. She is saved, of course, and she is brought back by the *sauveteur* to the *apartement* of Pierre (of course, what other address could she give ?), and the *sauveteur* of course receives a reward—200 francs exactly. Good-bye to Brittany, good-bye to freedom, once more the *hannetons* are attached—no remedy, not even divorce.

Les Hannetons stands apart from the rest of the work of M. Brieux, which is serious and grave. *Les Hannetons* is low comedy bordering on farce, lightened by subtle irony, a surprising thing for M. Brieux to have produced,

just the one thing one would have argued he was incapable of doing, had he not done it ; a most amusing, mirth-provoking play, well constructed, rapid and light in movement, racy dialogue, pointed satire. But even here at his most "*boulevardier*" M. Brieux implies a social question. From the social point of view this sort of union is an evil ; for once M. Brieux laughs at an evil, and he laughs so heartily that one can only regret that he does not laugh oftener. The "*ménage*" here satirised is supposed to be essentially Parisian ; much to the author's surprise the piece has proved successful in other countries, not excepting England and America.

LA FRANÇAISE. Comedy in three acts. First produced April 18th, 1907, at the *Odéon*, and played forty-nine times.

The play begins at Trouville at the home of Pierre Gontier, a manufacturer. We have the picture of a real French home as it is understood by two real French women, Geneviève and Marthe, the daughter and second wife of Gontier. The picture is designed to instruct the foreigner, to correct the impression that the entire feminine population of France is composed of Zazas and Sapphos. The foreigner arrives upon the scene in the person of Bartlett, an American from the Far West, who accompanies Charles, the nephew of Gontier. Charles has been in Bartlett's charge since infancy, and is now come to France to see his father's native land and to visit his father, a sort of hermit, who has retired to live on a property of his own in the heart of the country. Bartlett and Charles are full of false ideas about France and French life and they show their ignorance, but they

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are well received. Marthe cordially and frankly does her best to make them feel at home and Gontier, whose business has not been progressing, is on the look out for a partner. Why not Bartlett, the rich and enterprising American ?

The second act takes place in the country house of the elder Gontier, father of Charles. The hermit turns out to be a regular character, and the opening scenes are full of his amusing whimsicalities. A romance is brewing between Charles and Geneviève. Finally comes the scene between Bartlett and Marthe. The ranchman, mistaking the cordiality of the wife of Gontier, attempts to kiss her, and is quickly brought to his senses and begs her pardon.

Bartlett (déconfit, balbutiant ; presque tout à lui-même, en monologue). Pardon—I beg your pardon—Je ne savais pas—Enfin—si je—je puis—mon—je puis dire mon excuse—to excuse me—vous êtes un drôle de peuple—Vous êtes vantards—boasters ? Oui, vantards de vos défauts et hypocrites de vos qualités—Alors—si on n'est pas prévenu, on vous croit sur parole, et on fait des mistakes, des gaffes.—Et l'embêtant, c'est qu'on ne sait plus comment les réparer.—J'ai—I am very sorry for it. Je bafouille.—Qu'est-ce que—Faut-il que je m'en aille ?—Qu'est-ce qu'il est d'usage de faire quand on a fait ce que j'ai fait ?—C'est embêtant—Je sens bien que je ne puis pas rester là et je ne sais pas comment m'en aller ni comment j'oserai vous revoir ? (Il s'éponge.)

Marthe (après un éclat de rire). Allez-vous-en tout simplement, Monsieur Bartlett, et revoyez-moi comme si rien ne s'était passé. Vos regrets sont trop naïfs pour n'être pas sincères—Et puis, vous avez des circonstances atténuantes. (Elle lui tend la main.) Seulement, ne vous y trompez plus, hein ? (Elle sort.)

Everything ends happily in the third act. Bartlett becomes the partner of Pierre Gontier and lends his financial support and practical business experience to the exploitation of his invention. Charles is to marry Geneviève and to settle down in the land of his fathers. An agreeable comedy on an interesting subject. The author himself admits that something is lacking.

SIMONE. Play in three acts. First produced at the *Comédie Française*, April 13th, 1908, and played forty times.

The play opens at the house of Sergeac in Saintonge. Two months before Sergeac and his wife Gabrielle were found one morning swimming in blood. Gabrielle was dead, Sergeac with difficulty was brought back to life, but he could throw no light on the mysterious affair; after an attack of brain fever he can remember nothing; he still writes to his wife and cannot understand why there is no reply. The affair is to be inquired into, Maître Chaintreaux is summoned to advise; the father, the father-in-law, and the doctor discuss the situation with him.

Lorsy (à M. de Sergeac père). Nous sommes décidément en présence d'un double suicide.

M. de Sergeac père. Nous n'en savons rien.

Chaintreaux. Voulez-vous, messieurs, que nous établissons d'abord les faits? Nous nous efforcerons ensuite d'en tirer des conclusions.

M. de Sergeac père. Maître Chaintreaux a raison.

Lorsy. En effet. Le 20 October dernier, il y a par conséquent exactement deux mois, mon gendre, M. de Sergeac est parti d'ici vers huit heures pour prendre le train à Royan. . . . Le lendemain matin, Hermance,

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notre vieille domestique, est entrée dans la chambre de ma fille. Elle l'a trouvée à terre, morte, en toilette de nuit, le cou traversé par une balle de revolver. Non loin de lui son mari râlait, une balle dans la poitrine. Voilà le drame. . . .

M. de Sergeac père. Qu'il y ait suicide à deux ou crime passionnel.

Lorsy. Crime passionnel ! Mais c'est impossible.

Chaintreaux. Laissez—Laissez.

M. de Sergeac Père. Quoi qu'il soit arrivé, nous avons pensé que notre devoir était de prendre dès le début, toutes nos dispositions afin que Simone ignore toujours le drame qui a coûté la vie de sa mère.

Lorsy. Songez que ce serait pour elle non seulement un trouble moral, mais peut-être, lorsqu'elle sera en âge de se marier, une cause de graves difficultés.

Chaintreaux. Je vous approuve complètement. Quel âge a-t-elle ?

M. de Sergeac Père. Six ans. Comme il a bien fallu lui apprendre que sa pauvre mère n'était plus, nous lui avons dit qu'elle était morte à la suite d'un accident de cheval. Nous sommes donc tranquilles de ce côté-là pour le moment. Mais nous nous sommes trouvés en présence d'un événement, étrange, inconnu, effrayant. Mon fils, guéri de sa blessure, a perdu la mémoire. . . . Il se rappelle tout jusqu'au matin du drame. A partir de là, c'est un trou noir. Il a fallu donner une réponse à ses demandes d'explications relatives à sa blessure. D'après le docteur une révélation brutale pouvait tout remettre en question. Nous lui avons raconté qu'il avait reçu un coup de feu pendant une battue.

Lorsy. Et il croit sa femme en voyage.

.

M. de Sergeac Père. Voilà donc l'état de mon fils ! Ce qui nous a fait vous appeler, maître, c'est que le médecin expert pense que le malade est maintenant en

état de subir un interrogatoire. Or, le docteur Vergne redoute encore pour mon enfant les conséquences que pourrait avoir la révélation brutale des faits par le juge . . . et comme l'interrogatoire du juge est imminent, nous avons décidé d'agir aujourd'hui même devant vous, afin que vous puissiez nous donner des conseils à lui et à nous, selon ce qui va nous être révélé.

Sergeac is brought in; the doctor by his questions does all he can to awaken his memory.

Le Docteur. Je voudrais vous faire retrouver de vous-même et dans l'ordre des événements, la conscience de vos souvenirs.

Sergeac. Je veux bien. Aidez-moi.

Le Docteur. Selon votre expression, il y a dans votre esprit un "trou noir." Cette lacune va du 20 Octobre dernier, jour de votre blessure, jusqu'au moment de votre réveil, jeudi.

Sergeac. Oui, docteur.

Le Docteur. Eh bien, reportez-vous à cette date du 20 Octobre. Faites un effort. Evoquez avec toute la précision, la netteté et l'intensité dont vous serez capable, les derniers événements dont vous avez gardé la mémoire.

Sergeac. Oui, docteur. Voilà . . . Le jour où j'ai été blessé pendant la battue aux sangliers—

Le Docteur. Pardon. Ceci n'est pas un souvenir direct. C'est le souvenir du récit qui vous a été fait.

Sergeac. N'est-il pas exact? N'est-ce pas la vérité? —J'ai bien vu que j'étais blessé par un coup de feu—

Le Docteur. Je répète ma demande. Quels sont vos derniers souvenirs personnels? . . . Qu'avez-vous fait le matin du 20 Octobre? Vous avez organisé la battue. Vous vous le rappelez

Sergeac. Très bien. . . . Oui—Je revois la chasse.

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Et, en effet, je ne retrouve pas le moment où j'aurais été blessé. (*Net*) J'en suis certain maintenant ce n'est pas pendant la battue que j'ai été blessé.

Le Docteur. C'est possible.

Sergeac. Je me vois revenant avec Georges. . . .

Le Docteur. Vous rentrez ici avec M. Georges de Nanchart ?

Sergeac. Oui. . . . Et je suis rentré dans ce salon. Nous avons—Attendez—oui—c'est comme lorsqu'on se rappelle un rêve. Nous avons dîné, puis, Georges et moi, nous sommes partis dans sa charrette anglaise, moi pour prendre le train de Paris, Georges pour rentrer chez lui. C'est notre voisin. Il m'a conduit à la gare ; il m'a tenu compagnie jusqu'au moment où nous avons entendu le train.

Le Docteur. Ensuite ?

Sergeac. Ensuite, je ne sais plus. (*Un long silence. Tous les yeux sont fixés sur Sergeac immobile.*) Je ne sais plus. C'est effrayant. Je ne sais plus.

Le Docteur. L'avez-vous pris, le train ?

Sergeac. Je ne sais pas. . . . Non, je n'ai pas pris le train.

Le Docteur. Pourquoi ?

Sergeac (*grave, à lui-même*). Je sais pourquoi.

Le Docteur. Dites-la.

Sergeac. Non. Une pensée m'est venue tout à coup qui m'a empêché.

Le Docteur. Quelle pensée ?

Sergeac. Cela ne regarde que moi.

Sergeac is overcome with terror ; he falls heavily, but is soon brought round ; then he asks to be told everything.

Sergeac. Où est Gabrielle ? (*Un silence.*) Monsieur

de Lorsy, c'est bien vrai ce qu'on m'a répété ? C'est bien de Madame de Lorsy que vous êtes en deuil ? Dites-moi—ce n'est pas de votre fille ?—Non ?—Alors vous l'avez vue il y a peu de temps ?—A-t-elle gardé son sourire si tendre et vous a-t-elle embrassé comme elle le fait à chacun de vos voyages, en affectant de vous parler comme un tout jeune enfant ?

M. de Lorsy (il sanglote). Mon enfant !—Ma Gabrielle !—Ma pauvre petite !—Ma pauvre petite !

Sergeac. Vous pleurez ! (*Sans éclat.*) Elle est morte, n'est-ce pas ? Allons ! Je le sais depuis cinq minutes. Gabrielle est morte. . . . (*Il fait silencieusement des efforts de mémoire infructueux, puis se frappant la tête de ses poings.*) J'ai besoin d'aide encore. . . . Docteur, voyez mon calme. Puisque j'ai appris sa mort, rien ne peut être plus terrible.

Le Docteur. Si.

Sergeac. Quoi ?

Le Docteur. Cherchez.

Sergeac. Sa mort a été une mort tragique, peut-être ?

Le Docteur. Oui.

Lorsy (si tordant de douleur). Oh ! Oh ! Oh !

Sergeac. Elle a été tuée ?

Le Docteur. Oui.

Sergeac. Par qui ?

Lorsy (lui sautant à la gorge). Par vous, misérable ! Par vous ! (*Le docteur et M. de Sergeac père détachent Lorsy de Sergeac et cherchent à le calmer.*)

Sergeac (très exalté). Oui ! Oui ! par moi ! Par moi ! —Je vois, je sais—Le voile s'est déchiré tout à coup—Oui, par moi ! Oui, par moi !

Lorsy. Oh ! le misérable !

Sergeac. Oui, je l'ai tuée !—Et j'ai fait justice !

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Lorsy. Justice ! Il dit que—Oh ! Oh ! Vous le laissez dire—Justice !

Le Docteur (à Sergeac père). Emmenez-le. Emmenez-le.

Lorsy (en sortant avec M. de Sergeac père). Il a tué mon enfant, et il dit qu'il a fait justice, le misérable !

Sergeac (halluciné, dans le même mouvement). Oui, justice !

Lorsy. C'est un assassin !

Sergeac (montrant la porte de gauche). C'est là.—Là—
—Ils étaient là—Elle se jette devant lui—

Lorsy. C'est un assassin ! C'est un assassin !

Sergeac. Il se sauve, lui, comme un chien qui a peur du fouet. (*Il fait le geste de tirer un revolver de sa poche et de faire feu.*) Moi—Moi—J'ai fait justice.

Such an act of justice is sanctioned, not only by the famous "Tue-la" of Dumas fils,¹ but also by article 324 of the Penal Code.² M. Brieux cannot accept this as justice. For him "*un meurtre reste un meurtre,*" murder is not made excusable by being called "*un crime passionnel.*" "Il n'y a pas de crime d'amour qui mérite la peine de mort—pas de pardon—mais pas de meurtre."³

After the lengthy quotation it need hardly be said that the effect of this first act is strong, not to say painful, that the case is put dramatically without a touch of didacticism. And, once more, there is the child to be thought of. What of Simone ?

The second act shows Sergeac and Simone settled in

¹ Préface de *La Femme de Claude*.

² Article 324 du Code pénal déclare excusable le meurtre commis par l'époux sur son épouse ainsi que sur son complice surpris en flagrant délit dans la maison conjugale.

³ M. Brieux—at an interview.

a villa on the coast of the Mediterranean. Years have passed. The tragedy of the first act is apparently forgotten. Sergeac has devoted himself to the education of his daughter. The memory of her mother has been kept sacred. Simone, of course, has not been told the truth. Returning, after long wanderings in the East, Sergeac lives a retired life, given up to the study of Oriental religions. Simone helps him; they are happy in a life of fellowship and collaboration. Michel Mignier and Simone have mutually declared their love, but are not yet betrothed. Michel is a young man of promise with a bent for philosophy. The two are fitly matched. All is well. Suddenly, Mignier *père* returns from Paris and abruptly breaks off all relations between the two families. He has learnt the family secret. Sergeac has to tell Simone that the marriage cannot be arranged. Naturally Simone must know why. Moved by her great sorrow, the father asks her pardon, thus inculcating himself.

Sergeac. Oh! comme tu souffres! Je te demande pardon! Pardon! Simone, je te demande pardon!
(*Il est aux genoux de sa fille.*)

Simone. Tu me demandes pardon! C'est donc de ta faute?

Sergeac. Non, non! Qu'est-ce que tu comprends? Qu'est-ce que tu vas deviner, mon Dieu!

He will tell her nothing and, regaining his self-possession, succeeds in making Simone swear that she will never seek to discover the details of the drama which he admits that he is hiding from her, and of which she must always be kept in ignorance.

In the last act Simone has learnt the truth from

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Hermance, an old servant. Her father's crime is horrible to her ; she can live with him no longer and tells him she is going away.

Sergeac. Tu veux me fuir, voilà tout.

Simone. Eh bien, oui !

Sergeac. Pourquoi ?

Simone. Cherchez !

Sergeac (*après un grand silence, avec effroi, à part*). Mon Dieu !—Je vais bien voir. (*Il s'approche de Simone, les mains tendues.*) Mon enfant !

Simone (*se reculant*). Mon père !

Sergeac. Je ne voulais pas te faire de mal, mon enfant. (*Simone regarde les mains de son père avec la plus profonde terreur, comme une hallucinée.*)

Simone (*à voix basse*). Oh ! (*Sergeac suit des yeux le regard de sa fille, comprend à demi et, lentement, cache ses mains.*)

Sergeac. Tu as—causé—avec Hermance——

Simone. Oui.

Sergeac. Et c'est depuis—que tu—que tu veux me fuir ?

Simone. Oui. (*Ils se regardent longuement.*)

Sergeac. Alors ?

Simone. Malheureux ! Malheureux ! Malheureux !

This painful situation was too much for the audience at the *répétition générale* ; accordingly the ending was softened ; Simone forgives her father.

This is the most dramatic play since *La Robe Rouge*—the thesis is completely absorbed in the action. M. Brieux is back on his own ground, reacting from an idea towards common human feeling.

SUZETTE. Play in three acts. First produced September 28th, 1909, at the *Théâtre du Vaudeville*, and played fifty times in 1909.

In this play M. Brioux returns to the situation of the child of parents who have separated, a theme already treated in *Le Berceau* and *La Déserteuse*. Suzette is the daughter of Henri Chambert, the son of a "*magistrat*" Chambert is not a downright villain, but light, selfish, unscrupulous in pleasure and business, and weak enough to be easily influenced by his narrow-minded parents. Chambert has married Régine Guadagne, a woman of some elegance and with a taste for society frivolities, and by no means *persona grata* in the eyes of her husband's parents. They regard her as a stranger, mistrust her, and consider her no fit person to have the care of their beloved grandchild Suzette. They watch their opportunity. One day Henri Chambert, though no model of conjugal fidelity himself, is outraged at the sight of a man kissing his wife. He takes the worst for granted, makes a scene, and Régine, at bay, hurls back at him in front of the servants: "*Oui, j'ai un amant.*" This is not technically true. Chambert is dissuaded by his parents from fighting a duel, but they take good care that the wife is not forgiven; he must divorce her and retain custody of the child.

In the second act Régine has carried off Suzette to the home of her own father, a retired naval officer, who lives with his two remaining daughters, Myriam and Solange. They live in a studio-apartment and everybody works. Guadagne is of an energetic disposition and does not believe that girls should be idle. The family atmosphere is in very strong contrast with that of the *famille* Chambert. Guadagne receives Régine with open arms.

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Chambert tracks her down. In the scene which follows Régine explains that she had certainly carried the flirtation rather far, but that she is not really guilty, and she asks his pardon. Chambert, by this time sufficiently under his mother's influence, definitely refuses. When all her pleadings and arguments fail, Régine threatens that if they attempt to execute their plan of separating her from Suzette she will defend herself. She will make public a fraudulent act committed by her husband in the matter of a large Government contract. Still Chambert is obstinate and the child is taken from the mother by a "*commissaire de police*" and a "*huissier*." In the last act we find Suzette the victim of the conjugal dispute, tortured by her *grandmère* Chambert, who does her best to make the child think ill of her mother and compels her to write curt letters to Régine. The *avoué* and the *avocat* do all they can (for professional reasons) to keep the case going. At the end of the play Régine, worn out with the struggle, comes to give her consent to anything in order to save Suzette from being tossed about from pillar to post.

Régine. J'aime mieux vous donner mon enfant que de m'exposer à la voir tomber malade d'émotion si nous continuons à nous la disputer. Je veux m'en remettre à votre bon cœur. Je vous demande de ne pas me faire mépriser par elle. . . . Vous me direz quand vous voudrez bien que je la voie—Je renonce à elle—Mon affection pourrait lui coûter trop cher. Je suis découragée, épuisée, abattue—Voilà ce que vous avez fait de moi.—Adieu—Adieu—Henri.

Henry. Mon père, parlez-lui——

Chambert. Nous sommes très émus—nous—nous vous remercions de——

Régine. Quel malheur que l'on m'ait toujours traitée

ici comme une étrangère, comme une intruse—Je n'aurais demandé qu'à vous aimer tous—Mais ce n'est pas la peine de parler de cela—Vous m'écrirez les uns ou les autres——

Henri. Je ne consentirai jamais à te laisser partir ainsi !

They forgive each other, even the parents are reconciled, and the tearful play closes with a sort of benediction from Chambert père :—

“ Le père, la mère, et leur petit enfant, c'est une trinité sacrée. Il faut tout accepter plutôt que de la désunir.”

Chapter VI

Brieux and the Social Play

THE social play of to-day, the play of M. Brieux, has a long and complicated genealogical table. To tell the story of its growth it would be necessary to go back to Becque, Augier, Dumas fils and Diderot, and to include to some extent that great body of social literature for which the name of Balzac stands.

The social play is a development of the *comédie sérieuse* and the *pièce à thèse*—it is not necessary to distinguish between a *pièce à thèse* and a *pièce sociale*; a *pièce à thèse* may be a *pièce sociale*—in fact, the social play, as M. Brieux understands it, generally is a *pièce à thèse*.

The social play was defined by Professor Lanson, at a consultation, thus :—

“ Du moment que les passions individuelles s’agitent dans un cercle d’intérêts sociaux, où l’attention porte plutôt sur les intérêts sociaux que sur les passions individuelles, il y a drame social.”

The centre of interest shifts from the characters to the conditions. The ideal of Diderot has become the fashion of the hour; after having been forgotten for nearly a century it was taken up by Dumas fils (unwittingly), developed by Augier and Becque, and has at last become a vitally important dramatic form—nor has it stopped developing yet. It follows from the definition

given above that the characters of the social play are less clearly defined than those of a tragedy of passion of Shakespeare or a *comédie de caractère* of Molière. It seems hardly fitting to condemn the form for a vagueness which is not only a reflection of the atmosphere of our time but is also appropriate to the end aimed at. To criticise Mr. Galsworthy or M. Brieux by comparison with Shakespeare or Molière is "hitting below the intellect."

The tone of a play depends necessarily on the mind that conceives it. The high seriousness of Mr. Galsworthy's *Justice* is in keeping with Mr. Galsworthy's conception of things. To him the social machine is a pitiless monster against which the individual has no chance—no more chance than has Œdipus against destiny. For M. Brieux the social machine is not invincible—he is for revolt; he is for smashing the platform and getting back to the solid ground; he will not submit to the machine, for him man is master of the machine. The hero of *Justice* dies, but in *La Robe Rouge* the heroine kills her judge. The plays of M. Brieux do not lend themselves to a formal classification, the author's sense of form being poor. They are serious plays, but have not the high seriousness of *Justice*. What Professor Lanson says of the work of Corneille¹ is, on the whole, true of the work of M. Brieux: "Un drame d'un caractère simplement sérieux et grave, intermédiaire entre le comique et le tragique."

The moment at which M. Brieux began writing is important; it shows what he reacts from. Just as he reacted towards literary craftsmanship from all the artistic twaddle of the 'eighties and 'nineties, so he re-

¹ Lanson, *Corneille*. Hachette, p. 50.

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acted from the unwholesome hothouse stuff which filled most of the Parisian theatres. Coming as he did from the open air, with a keen relish for life as he knew it, it occurred to him that it might be possible to make a play out of something other than adulterous sentimentalities. For a model he went back to Augier, to *Les Effrontés* and *Le Fils de Giboyer*.

He does not really belong to the school of Henri Becque, he was too hearty a man to accept the leadership of such an embittered egoist as Becque.

He does not really belong to the *Théâtre Libre*; ¹ at first he worked in the atmosphere of the *Théâtre Libre*, but he was never in his element there. He wears the coat of pessimism but he looks rather ridiculous in it, like an athlete who has slipped on a black frock-coat over his "things" to hurry to a funeral. But he learnt a good deal at the *Théâtre Libre*—he learnt how to situate his characters in their *milieu*, how to make detail tell on the stage. He was probably always very observant, even in the most high-minded Chateaubriand days of his boyhood; his career as a journalist exercised this faculty for observation; at the *Théâtre Libre* he

¹ What the *Théâtre Libre* was at this time may be judged by the following passage by Lemaître apropos of *L'Honneur*, a play by M. Henri Fèvre, produced about the same time as *Ménages d'Artistes*: "Je commence à trouver que le Théâtre Libre se répète un peu, et que, en outre, il continue trop à ne pas être toujours aussi vrai qu'il le croit. Premièrement donc, on s'y répète à satiété un seul sujet ou presque: la bassesse morale, la cupidité, l'hypocrisie, la sottise et la dureté des classes bourgeoises. . . . Si ignobles et si veules que soient les hommes, les femmes y sont en général beaucoup plus odieuses et plus abominables. Les hommes y gardent encore, ça et là, quelque conscience, quelque notion du bien et du mal, quelque sentiment de justice et pitié. Mais les femmes y sont absolument méchantes et 'amorales.' Les auteurs ne font grâce qu'aux femmes galantes." (Lemaître, *Impressions*, 6me Série.)

learnt how to make dramatic use of detail. For Dumas fils he had an innate dislike ; all the brilliancy, the straining after brilliant effects, and the romantic, unsound, overheated imagination, M. Brieux resents, he reacts from it. *Simone* is a definite and remarkable instance of reaction from Dumas fils, but the reaction is not restricted to this specific case, it is general all along the line. With the exception of a few plays, such as *Le Fils Naturel* and *La Question d'Argent*, Dumas fils is of no use to M. Brieux. But for Giboyer M. Brieux has all the use in the world. He embraces him with enthusiasm, takes him to his heart like a brother. Thus M. Brieux becomes the natural son of Augier.¹ *Giboyer* is the voice of the indomitable man under the platform, of the slave to the machine who serves because he must, but whose spirit is not broken, and he speaks with a directness that makes M. Brieux nod his head approvingly at every word. What M. Brieux likes above all in his master, Augier, is his simple honesty.

The social play begins with Augier. The stage usually lags behind the general literary movement. What the *roman social* had already achieved twenty years earlier in the hands of Balzac was now to be attempted in the theatre by Augier. At first he used the term *comédie politique*—a kind of play that had been neglected since the time of Beaumarchais—but Augier soon repudiated the name for *comédie sociale*. Augier, following Balzac, fully realised the social importance of the *question d'argent*. *Les Effrontés* and *Le Fils de Giboyer* are full of it. The most notable passage is in *Les Effrontés*, where the Marquis d'Auberive says :—

¹ " Pour Augier j'ai les sentiments d'un fils." Augier was not an appreciative father.

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"Ce qui m'amuse dans votre Révolution, c'est qu'elle ne s'est pas aperçue qu'en abattant la noblesse elle abattait la seule chose qui put punir la richesse. Quatre vingt neuf s'est fait au profit de nos intendants et de leurs petits. Vous avez remplacé aristocratie par ploutocratie. Quant à la démocratie ce sera un mot vide de sens tant que vous n'aurez pas établi comme ce brave Lycurgue une monnaie d'airain trop lourde pour qu'on puisse jouer avec."

M. Brieux continues the campaign against plutocracy. To him democracy is not a word empty of meaning—he has faith in the power of democracy to fight plutocracy—he believes it can found its strength on an ideal of human fellowship working for the common good. He seeks this ideal, not in a vague dream of the future, but in the experience of humanity as it grows. He is reactionary rather than progressive; he believes in tradition, though he is no aristocrat; aristocrat and plebeian join hands.

For his stand M. Brieux generally goes back to the nearest point of departure common to his fellows.

There are many differences between M. Brieux and Augier—differences in technique, quality of dialogue, use of asides, and complexity of intrigue (M. Brieux throws over the intrigue of Scribe). But there is one more important difference still—a fundamental difference in attitude. Augier contemplates the struggle against plutocracy with a faint heart, regretting the past, the old order that is disappearing in chaos. M. Brieux contemplates it angrily, strong in his faith for the future, bidding plutocracy begone; it, to him, is the old order, or, rather, no order at all, but a thing without any ideal, a compromise full of hypocrisies, played out, effete. M. Brieux dreams of an improved

society in the future, but he is willing to take men as they are if only they realise their situation and try to understand each other¹ instead of trying to make fools of each other, the result of which is that they are so afraid of being made fools of that they dare not stir. Augier and M. Brieux campaign against the same thing from different sides.

Giboyer is disguised as a *déclassé*, a Bohemian ; none the less he is the voice of the Paris plebs, just as was the Spanish barber, the hero of the Revolution, Figaro, whom Giboyer so much resembles. The torch he carries has been caught up by M. Brieux. So clearly marked is this that *Blanchette* is a continuation of the tirade against education in Scene 4 of the third act of *Les Effrontés* :

Le Marquis. Regretteriez-vous le bienfait de l'éducation ?

Giboyer. Il m'a mené coucher loin.

Le Marquis. Vous m'étonnez.

Giboyer. Tant qu'ont duré mes études j'ai vécu comme un coq en pâte. Je remportais tous les prix, et les marchands de soupe disputaient votre serviteur comme une réclame vivante, si bien qu'en philosophie j'avais obtenu de la concurrence une chambre à part, avec la permission de fumer et de découcher. Mais le lendemain de mon baccalauréat il fallut en rabattre.

Le Marquis. Votre bienfaiteur vous planta là ?

Giboyer. Oh non ! Il m'offrit une place de pion à six cents francs, mais il me supprima la chambre, la pipe

¹ Cf. Discours de M. Eugène Brieux on his reception at the Academy, May 12th, 1900. " Mais Halévy mettait en pratique la noble devise du grand philosophe-poète, Jean-Marie Guyau : Tout aimer pour tout comprendre, tout comprendre pour tout pardonner."

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et les permissions de dix heures. Ça ne pouvait pas durer. Je lâchai l'enseignement et je me jetai dans les aventures, plein de confiance dans ma force et ne soupçonnant pas que *ce grand chemin de l'éducation ou notre jolie société laisse s'engouffrer tant de pauvres diables est un cul-de-sac.*

This last phrase is the very text of *Blanchette*.

It is the true *comédie sociale* that M. Brieux continues, not the *comédie politique*. The distinction between the two is marked from the first by Augier :—

“ Quoiqu'on en ait dit cette comédie n'est pas une pièce politique dans le sens courant du mot. C'est une pièce sociale. Elle n'attaque et ne défends que les idées abstraction faite de toutes formes de gouvernement.”¹

It cannot be too emphatically stated that M. Brieux is not a socialist party politician. When he attacks the *bourgeois* ideas he does not attack them because they are *bourgeois*, he attacks them because to him they are bad ideas prevalent under the *bourgeois* régime. For all that the *bourgeois* remains a human being to him. He does not split humanity up into human beings and *bourgeois*. His democracy includes the *bourgeois* but not the hypocritical ideas. Nor does he put the *bourgeois* always in the wrong ; he does not always give the *beau rôle* to the plebeian. There are extenuating circumstances even for a Réboval ; the men of the Landrecy foundry who threaten to strike (in *Les Bienfaiteurs*) are shown up in their true light. His propaganda is neither for party nor for class ; it is human propaganda, for the man against the machine.

¹ *Le Fils de Giboyer*. Préface de la première édition.

"Monsieur Brieux, à l'encontre de beaucoup de nos plus brillants écrivains, distingue très sûrement et très nettement le bien du mal, et aime à nous signifier fortement qu'il fait cette distinction. Il a quelque chose de bonhomme Richard ou d'un Simon de Mantua ; car il ne recherche point les cas subtils et rares, il ne redoute pas les lieux communs de morale, et comme il a raison ! Toutes ses pièces sont des comédies didactiques, je dirai presque des moralités et des soties. 'Il ne faut pas donner aux filles pauvres une instruction qui les déclasse' (*Blanchette*). 'Le pharisaïsme même de bonne foi, n'est point la vertu' (*M. de Réboval*). 'La politique est une grande corruptrice' (*L'Engrenage*). Chaque pièce est, d'un bout à l'autre, et sans distraction, la démonstration méthodique de chacune de ces vérités. Par là M. Brieux rappellerait un peu trop ce fâcheux Boursault ou ce pénible Destouches, s'il ne faisait songer beaucoup plus encore, par sa simplicité et par la spontanéité de son talent dramatique, à l'excellent tailleur de pierres, Sedaine, auquel il ressemble, du reste, par l'absence du style. Mais voici où il apparaît surtout original. Il a l'esprit, non pas audacieux (cela est trop facile) mais brave ; il se porte à l'étude des grandes questions, de celles qui intéressent toute la communauté humaine, de l'air d'un auto-didacte qui aurait l'esprit très neuf, le jugement très droit, et le cœur très chaud. Mais en même temps ce prêcheur candide est un observateur très véridique, très minutieux, et parfois très pénétrant de l'humanité moyenne. Il communique ainsi, je ne sais comment, au plus glacial des genres la couleur et la flamme. Ses 'moralités' vivent ; et c'est cela qui est extraordinaire."¹

The *prêcheur candide* and the *observateur très véridique* continue to keep each other company throughout the

¹ Lemaître, *Impressions*, Xme Série, p. 14. This passage, written apropos of *Les Bienfaiteurs*, is a true estimate of the author of the plays which precede *Les Trois Filles de M. Dupont*. What Lemaître thinks of the man who wrote this latter play may be seen from the quotation on pp. 49, 50, 51.

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work of M. Brieux. The social play of M. Brieux never develops beyond the propagandist stage.

It can no longer be denied that the stage is a useful means of propagating ideas that are established as sound but which are not yet common property. M. Brieux claims the right to make use of the stage for purposes other than dramatic, for the purpose of making known to the masses ideas invented or upheld by philosophers and savants.¹ This is his mission, this is what prompts him to sermonise. The tendency to sermonise is constant throughout the work of M. Brieux ; at times the sermon is sufficiently absorbed in the dramatic theme, at times it so dominates the dramatic theme as to reduce the play to a didactic dialogue ; the latter is too often the case in the later plays, e.g. *Les Avariés*, to take the extreme example. For such plays M. Brieux has been severely censured ; even by those who admit that his aims are good and his views sound, it is argued that a play is not an appropriate medium, nor the theatre the appropriate place for them ; that they would be more acceptable if preached from the pulpit, or published as tracts, pamphlets, and scientific articles.

M. Brieux would not deny the claims of the pulpit and tract—*Les Avariés* itself was read from a pulpit in Geneva—but he would claim an equal right for the stage to treat such subjects, if not a superior right, because it is of greater use for propaganda work, the audience appealed to being numerically greater, and (what is more important) out of the reach of pulpit and pamphlet. The public that will not go to church and

¹ " Herbert Spencer est le maître de mon esprit." (M. Brieux, interview.)

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will not take the trouble to read will go to the theatre. Furthermore, it is too late to object that the theatre is primarily a place of amusement ; this may be true, but it does not rule out serious plays. The stage may be only secondarily a place for a serious play, but the serious play has been a success on the stage, witness *La Robe Rouge*, ergo, the stage can be used for such a purpose.

There remains one ground for criticism—that such a play as *Les Avariés* is dramatically deficient. Such criticism is just. *Les Avariés* is a poor play. But it is unjust to argue from such a play that M. Brieux is no dramatist. Time and again he has shown that he is a dramatist of great power and skill, and even among the later plays are to be found *Les Hanneçons* and *Simone*, to prove that the author of *Maternité* and *Les Avariés* has not lost his sense of dramatic values.

It is easy to refer to the influence of a contemporary writer, nothing is more difficult than to determine that influence. On the whole the influence of M. Brieux seems to be reactionary rather than progressive. He has been called the “sergent de ville des lettres.”

“Au point de vue général, qu’il s’agisse d’art, de philosophie, ou même de moral, il est difficile d’accorder, en effet, une influence quelconque sur l’évolution générale des idées aux pièces-à-thèse de M. Brieux. M. Brieux ne combat point à l’avantgarde, il n’essaie point de généraliser sa pensée, il s’attaque aux travers qu’il rencontre sur sa route et qu’il juge immédiatement inadmissibles. C’est le sergent de ville des lettres.”¹

The conclusion to this history cannot yet be written ; the career of M. Brieux is not finished. Who knows what

¹ Commedia Illustrée, October 15, 1909.

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he may yet do? This study must necessarily be inconclusive. *La Foi* and *La Femme Seule* have not even been touched on. The body of work herein considered is sufficient to establish his reputation; his career is a remarkable and an honourable one; it seems perfectly safe to say that one of the plays, at least—*La Robe Rouge*—is as good as anything in the dramatic production of contemporary France.

It must be left to chance and to posterity to choose masterpieces and immortals; the plays of M. Brieux are important to-day, at any rate, whatever their future may be. Whatever may be their literary worth, they certainly have theatrical value, and they furnish social documents of considerable significance.

M. Brieux is a representative man. He is fond of privacy, but he is not isolated. He shares frankly and fully the life of the community. He focusses the best aspirations of a large body of his fellows. He draws his inspiration from the muddy depths of the democratic conscience—no easy thing to do—no futile thing to have done.

THE END



